UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Santa Barbara

A Child's Call: Braiding Narratives in the Face of Racial Violence

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in English

by

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September 2018

The dissertation of Corinne Bancroft is approved.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"'There is no unraveling the rope': The Ethics of Braided Narratives" will appear as an article "The Braided Narrative" in the October 2018 issue of *Narrative*. It remains the final chapter of the dissertation with the permission of the journal.

"A Child's Call" is more of "A Child's Response" to those who helped me "come of age" intellectually. To those who read to me as a child. To Kate Oubre and Nancy Rabinowitz who introduced me to Louise Erdrich, good teaching, and activism. To Peter Rabinowitz who helped me see how "Lit and Ethics" can be a way of life. To the radical women of the Literature and the Mind Initiative at UCSB who demonstrate daily that thinking and feeling are best accomplished synonymously, especially Julie Carlson. To my brilliant, generous committee, Kay, Bishnu, and Carl, whose comments and critiques kept this project always inspiring and alive. Most of all to Kay, who can somehow play Dorethea Brooke, my fairy god mother, and Cyd Charisse all at the same time. And finally to my Cappy, Nicole Dib.

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"Euclid at the Core: Recentering Literary Education" [with Peter J. Rabinowitz], *Style* Vol. 48, No. 1 (2014): 1-34.

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ABSTRACT

A Child's Call: Braiding Narratives in the Face of Racial Violence

by

Corinne Bancroft

"Hey, Mr. Cunningham," Scout Finch calls to the single familiar face in a crowd of white men as she stands at the door of a jail that wrongly incarcerates a Black man for a crime that she does not understand. This famous scene from Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1960) where an eight-year-old stops a lynch mob is both object and emblem of my dissertation project. "A Child's Call: Braiding Narratives in the Face of Racial Violence" draws on critical race theory and cognitive approaches to literature to show how contemporary American writers focus on child characters as instruments for narrating violence and violation, *and* how these children's voices call adult characters and actual readers toward a heightened sense of social responsibility. While Scout's pleasantries move the adult characters toward an everyday responsibility of caregiving, other such child protagonists face insurmountable barriers: in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970), all adults fail to hear the cry of ten-year-old Pecola Breedlove, and many, such as the white storekeeper fail to "see" her. Despite their differing political analyses and aesthetic projects, both Lee and Morrison trust a child with the task of reimagining the world and realigning our ethical responsibilities.

The figure of the child leads me through two genres that constitute community through narration: the United States' variation on the *bildungsroman*, the coming of age novel, and an emerging genre I term the "braided narrative"— novels in which multiple

narrators tell distinct, often incommensurate, stories that form a complicated constellation in the same storyworld. When Morrison pairs Claudia and Pecola with *The Bluest Eye*'s other narrators, she begins to forge this new genre that diverges from the style of *Mockingbird*'s single narrative voice. Like Morrison, Louise Erdrich, Ana Castillo, Nicole Krauss, and many others take up this strategy of casting child-narrators among a chorus of raconteurs who narrate different, conflicting stories. "A Child's Call" proposes a developmental relationship between the coming of age novel and the braided narrative for the reading of American literature. My project proposes a feminist and anti-racist progression of ethical positions staged in these two genres; the relationship between the reader and the protagonist develops from one of identification, to one of maternal care, and finally, to one of empathy that both acknowledges and requires difference.

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"Hey, Mr. Cunningham," Scout Finch calls to the single familiar face in a crowd of white men that she doesn't know is a lynch mob as she stands at the door of a jail that incarcerates a Black man for a crime that he did not commit and that she does not understand (174). The eight-year-old's call cuts through the masculine tension and attendant posturing. Her ignorance of the power distributions between the races pauses potential racist violence. Instead, her naïvely civil address activates the adult's relational responsibilities born of everyday proximity despite her unwitting evocation of the economic relationship between the Cunninghams and the Finches. The child's words implore the grown-up to respond to those fragile social attachments that are too easily trumped by macro-historical hierarchies of race, class, and gender. This moment of cross-generational recognition proposes relationships that call us towards a responsibility that is simultaneously necessitated and made possible by difference—both that unassailable distance between the other with whom we have chosen to be most intimate and the phenotypical distinctions that have petrified into the historical antagonisms that underwrite exploitation and genocide. In this famous scene from Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), the child's call moves the adult towards an everyday responsibility of caregiving that forecloses that night's violence. I begin with Scout, a child-narrator whose barefoot charm channels her nineteenth-century predecessor, Huck Finn, because her late-night pleasantries are perhaps the most famous. But other such child protagonists face insurmountable barriers: in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970), all adults fail to hear the cry of ten-year-old Pecola Breedlove, and many, such as the white storekeeper fail to "see" her. Like Jean Toomer's "Portrait in Georgia," Morrison's novel exposes the uneven power relations, racial, gendered and classed, that render Pecola invisible

but that make white girls like Scout legible. Morrison describes the storekeeper's "total absence of human recognition" almost as a perceptual error: "[s]omewhere between retina and object, between vision and view, his eyes draw back, hesitate, and hover. At some fixed point in time and space he senses that he need not waste the effort of a glance" (48). The calculus of the color line compounded by class and gender has been so inscribed in America's imaginary that it not only controls the very perception of other people, but also programs potential responses to their words.

Despite their differing political analyses and aesthetic projects, both Lee and Morrison trust a child with the task of reimagining the world and realigning our ethical responsibilities. Both authors foreground a potential attachment between child and adult that balances the vulnerability of the young with the adult's capacity to care. Age is the only difference that time requires all creatures to traverse, and relating across this difference developmentally begins with bonding rather than fear. If Scout's call to Mr. Cunningham can stand for *Mockingbird*'s appeal to American readers to overcome prejudice, can the narrative voice of children like *The Bluest Eye's* Claudia and Pecola call readers toward more responsive relationships? The lives of those like Tom Robinson, who was shot by police, and Pecola Breedlove, whose mind shatters while her body survives violation, mark the stakes of these questions. "A Child's Call" shows how contemporary American writers focus on child characters as instruments for narrating violence and violation, *and* how these characters' voices call adult characters and actual readers toward a heightened sense of social responsibility.

While the majority of the project focuses on the affective, cognitive, and ethical affordances of the child-narrator, the figure of the child has lead me to recognize a new type

of novel: the braided narrative— distinct stories told by different narrators that twine together to form a single novel. When Morrison pairs Claudia and Pecola's first-person sections with *The Bluest Eye*'s omniscient narration, she begins to forge this new genre that diverges from the style of *Mockingbird*'s single narrative voice. The braided narrative fosters a sense of community, but does not take the nation as the horizon. Often, the braided narrative emphasizes connections among characters bound in everyday interactions even though those characters may not be members of the same imagined community; nor are we asked to identify with a single character. Because the narrative perspectives of the braided narratives are necessarily multiple, they train readers to hold several—often incommensurate—subjectivities in our mind simultaneously. The formal attention to different experiences that are often engendered by historical antagonisms eschews the abstractions that usually facilitate national affiliation. In this way, the braided narrative places an ethical burden on the reader: to engage a multiplicity of narrative perspectives, sometimes on the same event, and to understand the interdependencies that constitute community.

"A Child's Call" focuses on literature written by women authors in the United States after 1960—primarily, Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1960), Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970), Louise Erdrich's *The Round House* (2012) and *The Plague of Doves* (2008), and Nicole Krauss's *The History of Love* (2005). I chose these novels not only because they were written by some of the most luminary authors of our time (both in terms of the aesthetic and political accolades they have won and the innovative new techniques they have developed), but also because they all deal with questions about racial violence that are as urgent today as they were in 1960. *Mockingbird*, *The Bluest Eye*, and *The Round House* all raise the issue of rape, a form of gendered violence used to subjugate classes and races.

This particular form of violence depends on the intersection of gender and race and has been used historically not only to subjugate women but also to perpetuate racial hierarchies and hatreds. Kimberlé Crenshaw, a key voice in the field of Critical Race Theory, used sexual violence as a key site to explain her foundational theory of "intersectionality." Crenshaw proposes "intersectionality as a way of framing the various interactions of race and gender in the context of violence against women of color" (1296). Crenshaw's theory makes clear the social mechanisms that allow for conviction of Tom Robinson for a crime he didn't commit in *Mockingbird* and facilitate the violence against women of color in *The Bluest Eye* and *The Round House*. While *The Plague of Doves* and *The History of Love* do not engage explicitly with sexual violence, they do ask how we can reimagine social relations in a world shadowed by collective trauma such as the genocidal conquest that formed the United States and the Holocaust in Europe. Lee, Morrison, Erdrich, and Krauss turn to the voice of the child to invite readers to set aside preconceived notions of social structures and realign attachments.

Much of "A Child's Call" focuses on *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Bluest Eye*, and *The Round House* as emblematic of many novels with child-narrators. The narrative strategies that Lee, Morrison, and Erdrich develop in these important novels demonstrate the affective, cognitive, and ethical affordances of the child-narrator because these three novels all do to readers what Scout did to the lynch mob. By featuring child-narrators, these three novels refocus our attention on intimate, familial attachments moving us away from learned forms of power relations and implore us to rethink historical antagonisms. This is easily measured by these novels' educational popularity. As political scholar Peter Augustine Lawler says, "*To Kill a Mockingbird* comes close to exhausting what we have of an edifying common culture. Virtually all students come to college having read the book and/or seen the film, and

it's impossible to find a second book of any consequence about which that can be said" (263). Because *Mockingbird* plays such an important role in our shared imaginary, it is important to understand the work that it does. Likewise, high school and college syllabi often feature *The Bluest Eye* and if the National Book Award winning novel, *The Round House* is not yet a classroom staple, it soon will be. All three novels are transcendent in some sense—they have taken on a greater role in the American imaginary than the texts themselves.

Moreover, all three authors envisioned a greater social purpose for their respective novels than simply entertaining readers or becoming canonical cornerstones. Harper Lee wrote, in defense of her novel being banned, "[s]urely it is plain to the simplest intelligence that 'To Kill A Mockingbird' spells out in words of seldom more than two syllables a code of honor and conduct, Christian in its ethic, that is the heritage of all Southerners" (22).[1] Through her novel, Lee hoped to impart an ethical code particular to her religion and region. While Morrison's understanding of the power systems differs from Lee's, an ethical imperative also motivates her writing. Unlike Lee, who posits a specific code, Morrison asks

[1] Lee wrote this in a letter to the editor of *Richmond News-Leader* on January 15th 1966. The newspaper had been hosting a debate about the banning of the novel in the Hanover County public schools. In another act of archaic chivalry, the newspaper wrote "In most controversies, the lady is expected to have the last word. In this particular discussion, it seems especially fitting that the last word should come from the lady who wrote "To Kill A Mockingbird." With Miss Lee's letter, we call a halt, at least temporarily, to the publication of letters commenting on the book-banning in Hanover County" (22). Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird* Harold Bloom.

readers to face a suffering too often ignored and see the intricate systems that cause it. Morrison explained that she wrote *The Bluest Eye* because the literary archive lacked such a book:

> I wanted to show how painful this constructed horrible racism was on the most vulnerable people in the society, girls, black girls, poor girls. And that it really and truly could hurt you. So that's what I was looking for, and no one, I thought, had written that book, so since I really wanted to read it, I thought I should write it.[2]

Morrison wrote her first book to reveal something about how society works and to invite readers to join her in that understanding. Erdrich takes this project further in *The Round House*; she doesn't just want readers to understand something they might be ignorant of, she wants them to advocate for change. In an interview she explained, the novel "should be about the complexity of this [the law], but if I go around say on a book tour and say 'I've just written a book about jurisdictional issues!' [Audience laughs.] Exactly. You need a thirteen-year-old boy. You need a thirteen-year-old boy!"[3] The exigency behind *The Round House*, like *Mockingbird* and *The Bluest Eye*, comes from a sense of ethics. While Lee wanted to communicate the sense of pride she felt about her religion and region, and Morrison wanted to show the violent effects of racism, Erdrich wanted to expose the injustice and violence caused by the U.S.'s relationship with tribal governments. In Erdrich's interview, she names a fundamental tool for achieving this complicated purpose—a child-narrator.

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[2] Toni Morrison made this comment in an interview on "The Colbert Report" 11/19/2014.

[3] Louise Erdrich shared this insight in an interview with Samson Occom Professor of Native American Studies Bruce Duthu at Dartmouth.

Child-narrators, as the term implies, are a particular type of character narrator that are children during a significant part of the novel's story and narrate from that perspective of innocence and naivety. Structural narratologists distinguish between the story time (the chronological time of the narrated events) and discourse tome (the timing of the telling). To be a child-narrator, the narrator must be a child at the time of the recounted events (at the level of story), but not necessarily at the time of the recounting (at the level of discourse). While many child-narrators start out as children and grow into adults, like Pip in *Great Expectations,* Jane in *Jane Eyre,* and the heroes of many other *bildungsromane*, the characters I focus on here are children for the majority of the novel's story. In *Mockingbird*, for instance, Scout grows from six to almost nine while her brother matures from ten to thirteen. The child-narrators in *The Bluest Eye* are nine, ten, and eleven, and Joe Coutts is the thirteen-year-old boy Erdrich needed for her story. These writers position their characters on the brink of puberty, and many novels include a scene either where the character witnesses or experiences the changes we associate with that time of life. Morrison begins *The Bluest Eye* with Pecola's first menstruation; Lee includes a similar menstruation scene in *Go Set A Watchman*, the rumored first draft of *Mockingbird*; and, Erdrich balances the seriousness of *The Round House* with Joe and his friends' sexual giddiness. More importantly, these writers outline the potential for an intellectual maturation of their character-narrators as well. In the first chapter of *The Round House*, for instance, Joe exchanges a look with his father that he describes as "odd, as if between two grown men, and I had not been ready" (7). While the maturing narrator recognizes the difference in his father's gaze, his sentences still reflect the innocence of a child; Joe writes, "I had actually just turned thirteen. Two weeks ago, I'd been twelve" (3). Scout observes a similarly

sudden change in Jem when he turns twelve, "[o]vernight it seemed, Jem had acquired an alien set of values and was trying to impose them on me: several times he went so far as to tell me what to do" (131). The growth in both Jem and Joe comes with a deep sense of moral responsibility. Just as the boys feel responsible for the world they are increasingly coming to understand, Morrison's Claudia connects her own actions to her friend's tragedy: "[w]e thought, at the time, that it was because Pecola was having her father's baby that the marigolds did not grow" (6). The coming of age in all these novels marks the transition from childhood to adolescence—a loss of innocence that does not quite lead to adulthood, but does lead to a loss of childhood.

Although I call them child-narrators, Scout Finch, Claudia MacTeer, and Joe Coutts are only children at the level of the story and not discourse. All three narrate their novels at what Joe calls "a removal of time," a time in the future after the narrated events have taken place (142). This narrative complexity is common among child-narrators—Scout, Claudia, Joe, like Marcel Proust's unnamed narrator all recount their childhood experiences from a point in the future, not always, but often as ambiguous as the waking dreams where Proust starts his novel. Scout begins *Mockingbird* at a point after Jem had broken his arm and after it had healed, at a time "[w]hen enough years had gone by to enable us to look back on them, we sometimes discussed the events leading to his accident" (3). Likewise, Claudia opens *The Bluest Eye* by naming the events that close the novel and explaining that "[i]t was a long time before my sister and I admitted to ourselves that no green was going to grow from our seeds. Once we knew, our guilt was relived only by fights and mutual accusations about who was to blame" (5). Although Joe does not have a sibling to debate the events leading up to the climax of his novel, he also begins *The Round House* with a metaphoric allusion to its close:

"[s]mall trees had attacked my parents' house at the foundation" (1). In all three novels, this narrative gesture introduces a fractal melody, so that upon re-reading, as Kenneth Burke writes in "Psychology and Form," "[i]n the opening lines we hear the promise of the close, and thus feel the emotional curve even more keenly than at first reading" (26).

The complexity of narrating "at a removal of time" also sets up a narrative voice that is not quite unreliable. On the one hand, Scout, Joe, and Claudia narrate from a child's mindset that doesn't understand the wrongs they name. The poignancy of this innocence resonates in the questions they ask: "what's rape?" eight-year-old Scout asks Atticus (153); "[w]hy did she smell like gas?" thirteen-year-old Joe asks his aunt after she confirms that his mother had been raped (15). On the other hand, narrating, as they do at a time after the narrated events have taken place, these characters actually do know the horrible answers to these questions, but they often narrate as if they don't. They are, at once, unreliable because they "tell[] us less than he or she knows," as James Phelan describes a type of unreliability, and honest to their experience (52). This technique of narrating "at a removal of time" allows these child-narrators to sometimes craft scenes where readers fill in what a child cannot know and at other times explain to us what we have refused to see.

Although *Mockingbird*, *The Bluest Eye*, and *The Round House* share this common narrative strategy, it may seem unbalanced to pair them. As of now, *Mockingbird* is the widest read and most popularly embraced. Morrison and Erdrich, on the other hand, are more accomplished writers. They have each won important literary awards and are frequently taken up in the academy. While *Mockingbird* is hard to escape in grade school, one should not graduate the university without reading Morrison or Erdrich. Further, Morrison and Erdrich's analysis of race relations are sharper and more incisive than Lee's

attempt. (In addition to their own insights, Morrison and Erdrich inform their novels with their perspectives as members of particular aggrieved communities and their works are more recent than Lee's.) That *The Bluest Eye* and *The Round House* are not yet as widely popular as *Mockingbird* is a symptom of the lingering racism in our society.

Each of these three novels, narrated by a child, faces the violence born of a historical hatred that has shaped the United States' national psyche. In *To Kill A Mockingbird*, "[i]t was Jem's turn to cry" when the Maycomb County jury convicted Tom Robinson of rape despite Atticus's unimpeachable defense; Jem's "angry tears" turn to a moral outrage that demands an explanation from his father (242). How could an American court, which Jem had just heard his father praise as our nation's "great levelers," convict a man so clearly innocent, physically incapable, in fact, of a crime meriting the death penalty (233)? Atticus's explanation of what he understood all along as an "inevitable verdict" conflates the jury with a lynch mob (253). His association stems not from the similarity of masculine ritual between courtroom proceedings and Klan meetings,[4] nor from the similarity of spectacle between *Mockingbird*'s trial and restoration era lynchings, but rather, because of the collective illogic of the jury. Atticus explains to Jem and Scout, "[t]hose are twelve reasonable men in everyday life, Tom's jury, but you saw something come between them and reason. You saw

[4] In *Go Set A Watchman*, the grown-up Scout witnesses her father attend a citizen's council meeting, the Klan's daytime cousin, from the same vantage point in the "Colored balcony" where she would view his famous defense *Mockingbird*. Because that scene explicitly references the *Mockingbird* trial, we can infer that Lee's artifice connected the two proceedings. Importantly, however, in *Go Set A Watchman*, Lee lets Atticus win Tom an acquittal (109).

the same thing that night in front of the jail" (251). That "thing" which neither Atticus nor Lee can name is the national neurosis of white supremacy and the accompanying fantasy where the cry rape requires the Pavlovian response of murder. It is the insane post-bellum fear of miscegenation, ironic in the wake of plantation rape that incites white mobs to brutality and murder. As Crenshaw avers, "[t]he well-developed fear of Black sexuality served primarily to increase white tolerance for racial terrorism as a prophylactic measure to keep Blacks under control" (1272). *To Kill A Mockingbird* confronts this tradition of racist violence by connecting the courtroom ritual to the public spectacle of a lynching, acknowledging that the drunken violence of midnight terrorism can and has become inscribed in the whiteness that frames the letter of the law.

The Bluest Eye, on the other hand, examines the personal, psychological effects of living in a society structured by such violence. By paring Claudia, the first child-narrator, with omniscient sections that give substance and insight into the other characters, Morrison reveals the social factors that push characters towards violence. She asks readers to condemn the actual (in contrast to the false allegation in *Mockingbird*), incestual rape that stands as the novel's central crime, but not without facing what made the father fail. By braiding together different narrative voices, Morrison forces her readers to care for Cholly, too, even as we condemn him for his crime. Further, Morrison forecloses a trial that plays such an important role in *Mockingbird*, a decision that begins where *Mockingbird* ends: a U.S. court is not a site of justice for Black people.[5] While Lee leaves progress in the hands of Atticus's progeny

[5] Morrison does not include a trial in *Beloved* (1987) either; a choice that is even more glaring given that she based her novel on the historical Margaret Garner who did have a

("[i]f you had been on that jury, son, and eleven other boys like you, Tom would be a free man"), Morrison demonstrates how the mental structures that make possible bad laws and decisions, like *Mockingbird*'s verdict, also make it easy for violence to find its way onto the backs of society's most innocent and vulnerable members (251).

Mockingbird and *The Bluest Eye* pair easily, bookending as they do the decade known for social change and shifting social awareness in the United States. While Lee and Morrison's texts explicitly raise issues of rape and incest, the subtext of both novels addresses the 1954 *Brown v Board of Education*, which some connected, in a Freudian leap, to miscegenation, a fear Lee summarizes in *Go Set a Watchman* (2015): "because you go to school with one Negro, or go to school with them in droves, you'll want to marry one" (270). In the racial rubric of *Mockingbird*, Mayella's desire for a Black man causes the central conflict that instigates Atticus's case. As both literary scholar Anne Anlin Cheng and cultural historian Robin Bernstein notice, *The Bluest Eye* dialogues with the doll tests that were central to the testimony of the lawyers who argued Brown. Through these experiments, psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark found that both white and Black children prefer white dolls and had thus adopted the bias at the core of segregation. As I'll discuss in greater detail in "Chapter Three: 'Hey, Mr. Cunningham,'" Morrison has Claudia detail the painful transition from the self-preserving "pristine sadism" she felt for white dolls to the "fraudulent love" adults and older girls expect her to feel (23). The reservation crime mystery of *The Round House*, published half a century later, might seem distant from the racial politics that *Mockingbird* and *The Bluest Eye* debate, but Erdrich's novel actually takes up the same

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trial—famous because of the legal ambiguity of trying her as a 'person' for the crime of murder or as 'property' under the Fugitive Slave Law.

issues of rape and race using the similar strategy of child-narration, but Erdrich targets a different set of laws. Like Lee, she questions the "inevitable verdict" of the court system, but like Morrison she refuses a court scene in fierce indictment of the lack of justice of the United States legal system.

What is it about these novels that make them classroom favorites? These fictional child-narrators ask us to consider serious issues, like rape and racial violence that we would be reluctant to discuss with their real-life counterparts. What is it about these novels that earned such acclaim, even though they raise some of the United States' most pernicious problems? For me, the strength of all three novels is as tied up in the emotional work they do as it is in the political analyses they offer. The word's morphology suggests movement outward, and when people want to describe the emotional power of an aesthetic object, we do often reach for particular verbs of movement—arrest, touch, and move. Pieces of art arrest us when they make us stop in our tracks and consider them deeply. Those arresting aesthetic objects prevent us from moving forward with our own lives until we process them. Slightly differently, we say a scene is touching when it seems to reach out of the work that contains it and affects us. While these descriptions of art often go hand in hand, the idea of a touching moment implies that although it does influence us, we can keep going. Finally, we often say that emotionally powerful books are moving. When we describe a novel as moving, we usually imagine an actual shift from one emotional state to another—this novel moved me to tears. Like the verb to arrest, it imagines the emotional life of a reader as moving forward on a track where we, the readers, get to determine our own emotions. While these three terms are often used interchangeably, they actually mean different, and in the case of to arrest and to move, opposite things. An arresting novel stops the independent movement forward; a

touching novel intervenes in the movement, or at least makes an impression on it, and a moving novel redirects it. Unlike the verbs 'to arrest' and 'to touch,' the third term, 'to move,' has currency in the sphere of social change. While we might also use the verb to arrest at a rally with the same denotation of preventing movement, it has a different connotation there than it does in the realm of art. To move on the other hand means the same thing in a social movement as it might in a book club. It suggests that people thought and felt one way before they were moved and changed course afterward. It doesn't imply social change, but it suggests actual motion in that direction.

While *Mockingbird*, *The Bluest Eye*, and *The Round House* do each of these actions for some readers, I associate one predominately with each novel. *To Kill A Mockingbird* arrests readers the way Scout arrested the lynch mob.[6] Scout pauses, but does not foreclose, the racist violence the lynch mob wanted to inflict on Tom Robinson. Instead, in the narrative arc of the novel, this scene merely postpones a violent death, which, in unfortunate prophecy, comes through the state apparatus currently responsible for the death of so many Black men. *Mockingbird* stops to consider racist violence, but then moves forward in terms of both plot and emotion to Boo Radley. In other words, *Mockingbird* does not create social change. It does hold open the possibility that that change is possible—when Jem grows up—but it doesn't get us there. Further, Morrison famously wrote about *The Bluest Eye* that "many readers remain touched but not moved" (211). Readers pity Pecola, but they don't necessarily do something. We better understand structural racism and the way that violence finds its way to the weakest and most vulnerable in society, but as Morrison's self-critique

[6] When conferring the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Lee in 2007, George Bush said "*To Kill a Mockingbird* still touches and inspires every reader".

comments readers might not feel complicit in that system. *The Round House*, on the other hand, moves readers, not only to tears, as the other two novels may do as well, but also towards political change. In 2012, when Erdrich wrote, published, and won the National Book award for the novel, white men could rape Native women on tribal lands and walk free. Because tribal jurisdiction does not extend to sexual crimes, many men, like the novel's antagonist, prey on Native women, knowing that because of this legal loophole their crimes won't be punished. In 2013, Congress renewed the Violence Against Women Act with a provision that extends tribal jurisdiction, an improvement that responds to the central polemic of Erdrich's novel, and provides, what she calls in a *New York Times* opinion piece, published the day the house took up the act, "a slim margin of hope for justice." *The Round House* moves people towards social change.

Despite Morrison's disappointment in her first novel, *The Bluest Eye* is one of the earliest novels to help form the braided narrative. Although Morrison asks her readers to condemn the crime she narrates, by switching narrative voices and concentrating on different characters' stories, she forces readers to critically engage with the assailant as well as the victim. While she doesn't repeat the neat triadic pattern of *The Bluest Eye* (Dick and Jane excerpt, Claudia's voice, omniscient narration) in her subsequent novels, the weaving together of distinct voices has become characteristic of her style. In terms of polyvocality, Erdrich belongs on the shelf next to Morrison.[7] At the time of its publication, as many critics

[7] In her influential essay on the "frustration of narrativity" in Erdrich's early novels, Rainwater writes,

> *Love Medicine* defies the reader's effort to locate a conventional plot—a temporal sequence of characters' actions traceable along a 'constant curve'

pointed out, *The Round House* was one of Erdrich's only novels to have a single narrator tell a story in chronological order from beginning to end.[8] Even considering the stories and dreams Joe reports hearing and the complication that he narrates at "a removal of time," *The Round House* is one of Erdrich's simplest novels. While Bakhtin identified the polyvocality inherent to the genre of the novel itself, "A Child's Call" traces how contemporary authors like Morrison and Erdrich help to forge a new genre by formally plaiting together different narrative threads.

"A Child's Call" proposes a developmental relationship between the coming of age novel and the braided narrative for the reading of contemporary American literature. The shift in the figure of the child that I trace in the project proposes a feminist and anti-racist progression between these two distinct genres; the ethical position of the reader develops from identification, to maternal care, to an empathy that both acknowledges and requires

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> with a teleological aim (the notion of plot as consisting of beginning, conflict, rising action, resolution, ending). Erdrich's novels conspicuously lack plot in this traditional sense of the term (171).

Rainwater is not alone in recognizing Erdrich's distinctive narrative style. Hertha D. Sweet Wong says that Erdrich's "multiple narrators confound conventional western expectations of an autonomous protagonist, a dominant narrative voice, and a consistently chronological linear narrative" (88). Kathleen M. Sands avers of *Love Medicine* "[t]here is no single version of this story, no single tone, no consistent narrative style, no predictable pattern of development because there is no single narrator who knows all the events and secrets" (37-38).

[8] Since then *LaRose* (2016) and *Future Home of the Living God* (2017) had single narrators.

difference. The *bildungsroman* is particularly apt, as its theorization suggests, for those who are themselves coming of age. In the coming of age novel, the affective function of a youth growing into adulthood is built on identification. Readers ignorant (or resistant) to the complexities of race formation in the U.S. can learn along with the young characters; and, reading through the eyes of a child facilitates the embrace of an innocence and idealism that is difficult for fictional and non-fictional adults. The canon of U.S. literature, as indicated by National Book Awards, high-school and college syllabi, and qualifying exam lists, shows a preference for this genre especially when considering texts by writers of color. In this archive of canonical *bildungsromane*, protagonists marked by race cannot come of age in U.S. society. The young men in mid-century novels, such as Darcy McNickle's *The Surrounded* (1936), Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940), Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1947), and Américo Paredes *George Washington Gomez* (1990, composed in the 1940s), are killed, go underground, or are forced to sell-out. These young men cannot find a productive role in American society while maintaining the politics of their racial identity. After *To Kill A Mockingbird* in 1960 and especially after *The Bluest Eye* in 1970,[9] a sub-genre of child-narrators takes center stage; Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972), Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1971), *The House on Mango Street* (1984), Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007) and Louise Erdrich's *The Round House* (2012) feature a protagonist only as a child.[10] This coed cohort not only indicates an increased inclusion of

[9] A variant that pairs a young white child with an adult black man has been a favorite in the American imaginary since *Huckleberry Finn* (1885) and *Intruder in the Dust* (1948).

[10] "A Child's Call" focuses on works of fiction; I have bookmarked the parallel tradition of memoirs and autobiographies such as Anne Moody's *Coming of Age In Mississippi* (1968),

female protagonists, but also, these child-narrators call adult readers towards an ethos of maternal care,[11] evoking our potential to provide the sort of care implicit in Donald Winnicott's concept of "holding." The *bildungsroman* is perhaps the most popular and politically powerful genre that deals with racism and sexual violation because, although those violences were created by adults, we have, as yet, been unable to grow out of them.

The braided narrative, on the other hand, is what Virginia Woolf might call a genre "for grown-up people" because the structure itself requires and engenders more maturity in its readers. The braided narrative is not yet as critically acclaimed or widely taught as the *bildungsroman*, so I hope my this project will focus critical attention on this genre for its ethical and aesthetic significance in American literature. Many contemporary American braided narratives, such as Nicole Krauss' *History of Love* (2005) and Louise Erdrich's *Plague of Doves* (2008), which I discuss in the final chapter, include child-narrators among their multiple raconteurs, and these young people evoke similar feelings as their counterparts in the *bildungsroman*. However, the structure of the braided narrative creates a constellation of interrelated stories that places more emphasis on community relationships than on the processes of individuation (as is the case in the bildungsroman). The ability to see and

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Maya Angelou's *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* (1969), Maxine Hong Kingston's *Woman Warrior* (1974) for a future complementary project.

[11] I use maternal not to foreclose the potential for fathers or others to care for the young but rather to acknowledge the historical and evolutionary tendency for mothers to take on this responsibility. As Nancy Chadorow argues, "the contemporary reproduction of mothering occurs through social structurally induced psychological processes," and the resulting gendered psychology of caregiving is important to my project (7).

empathize with experiences across identity lines has been associated with subordinated groups who have disproportionally been responsible for society's emotional labor. W.E.B. DuBois' theory of the double consciousness relies on African Americans' ability to see through the veil, and, as sociologist and psychoanalyst Nancy Chodorow explains, western society raises girls "with a basis for 'empathy' built into their primary definition of self in ways that boys do not" (167). The content of braided narratives exposes this problematic history of uneven responsibilities forged through exploited relationships while the formal structure both imagines more egalitarian ways of communal responsibility and positions readers to participate in this necessary care. In the braided narrative, readers cannot rely on identificatory impulses only; rather, we must imagine a community that requires responsibility and dependence.

In the first chapter, I detail the theoretical perspectives that frame "A Child's Call." I begin with Critical Race Studies because, as I hope this prelude has shown, the authors discussed in the project engage the uneven social landscape of the United States. While the sociological and legal insights provide an essential context for the work Morrison, Erdrich and others accomplish, fiction affords an engagement with the personal, the particular, the emotional that can be overlooked in those other disciplines. For that reason, I follow my discussion of Critical Race Studies with a consideration of the interpersonal field in which the ethical can emerge. For me, ethics is an important category that we use to apprehend the invisible, but visceral magnetism between people that both entwine us in relational fields and push us to develop systems of "ought" for how we might behave in these attachments. Like Emmanuel Levinas, I use ethical to describe that ontological tension that both pre-exists and shapes human relationships. Instead of turning to Western philosophy, which has historically

been blind to the epistemological traditions of the authors I discuss and has tended to ignore the experiences of women and mothers, I braid post-Freud psychoanalytic work on the "matrixial," and "intersubjectivity" together with the intellectual tradition of "radical mothering" and "mothering ourselves" established by lesbian feminists of color in the 1980s. While this may seem an odd combination, especially given the justified critiques of exclusion and narrow mindedness that scholars of color have mounted against psychoanalysis and white feminism, there is actually an important harmony among the theorists I discuss. By engaging them in a single archive, I hope to avoid the pitfalls of racialized silos of knowledge, and trace an intellectual tradition that is well-equipped to help us face our contemporary socio-political challenges.

The second chapter "Where is your mother?" is named for the chilling question that sets in motion Louise Erdrich's 2012 novel *The Round House*. Here, I pair attachment theory with intersectional feminism to consider the ways in which Erdrich, Lee, and Morrison lay groundwork for social change by creating a productive tension in the narrative space of a missing mother. While Erdrich's child-narrator is too young to understand the sexual violence that readers may already suspect, the thirteen-year-old does articulate the important role his mother plays in setting the rhythm that organizes his life. Lee and Morrison also foreground a mother's absence in a novel that engages serious social issues. In *Mockingbird*, Scout does not remember her late mother, and in *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison juxtaposes the harsh care of Claudia's mother with the neglect of Pecola's, whose maternal energies have been outsourced to the white child she's paid to raise. Imagery of attachment and maternal (in)attention function as proscenium walls framing the political questions that the novels stage. While the novels neither represent directly nor enact radical maternal relationships,

they do open a possibility for a sort of maternal care that leads towards transformation. I argue that by foregrounding the absent or absented mother, Erdrich, Lee, and Morrison engage traditional expectations of maternal care in order to shift readers toward what queer Black feminist Alexis Pauline Gumbs calls "the radical potential" of mothering.

The third chapter "Hey, Mr. Cunningham" turns to the cognitive work of child-narrators. The famous jailhouse scene in Mockingbird works because readers have access to a social script that Scout does not know. Likewise, Morrison and Erdrich rely on their readers filling in the awful knowledge of rape their child-narrators' innocence prevents them from knowing. This chapter puts recent work on cognitive approaches to literature in conversation with the understanding that interpretive strategies for reading fiction bear some relationship to interpreting the world. As we volunteer contextual knowledge that we want the child not to know, we rely on their narration not only for a report of the novel's events, but also for suggestions on how to interpret them. The asymmetrical relationship that emerges between a reader and a child-narrator facilitates a reworking of these interpretive strategies often in productive ways. By mixing the reader's cultural knowledge with the child's directions, authors can make important shifts in how we read the world; Lee's intervenes in the cultural narrative of lynching, Morrison exposes the power-structures that perpetuate violence, and Erdrich's advocates on behalf of Native women.

While the second and third chapters discussed the affective and cognitive affordances of the child-narrators, the fourth chapter "The Ethics of Killing Birds" critically engages the ethical assumptions that emerge in *Mockingbird*, *The Bluest Eye*, and *The Round House*. Atticus's adage that provides the title for *Mockingbird* serves as a guiding motif for this section. Extending Judith Butler's question about what makes for a grievable life, I ask how

do these novels render certain lives killable? In other words, why can we shoot all the bluejay's we want, when it's a sin to kill a mockingbird? In *Mockingbird*, Lee renders the murder of Tom Robinson as inevitable as the verdict; shot seventeen times, he stands in eerie prophecy of the many contemporary victims of police violence. Morrison's Cholly dies in the same state institution as Lee's character, but *The Bluest Eye* dedicates thirty-one pages to Cholly's childhood to make readers attend to the factors that led to his violence and death. In *The Round House*, Erdrich both acknowledges the epidemic of missing and murdered Indigenous women and flips the script to frame the deranged white man as necessary. While Erdrich's novel does not advocate murder, she does introduce an important interpretive lens that may help us see the need to prevent racist, misogynist violence.

The final chapter, "'There is no unraveling the rope': The Ethics of Braided Narratives" introduces the formal features and ethical affordances of this emerging genre. Many contemporary novels feature multiple narrators who tell distinct, sometimes incommensurate, stories. While this narrative strategy is often viewed as a relic of the short story cycle tradition or a postmodern trend, I argue that this technique actually constitutes a new subtype of the novel that I call the braided narrative. In braided narratives, novelists plait together different narrative threads, distinct in terms of both narrator and story, to grapple with both the poignant fissure that fractures the most intimate attachments between individuals and the chasm that historical violences carve between social groups. This chapter focuses on Nicole Krauss's *The History of Love* (2005) and Louise Erdrich's *The Plague of Doves* (2008) to detail the way the braided narrative's formal features facilitate ethical work that requires the recognition of different, often opposing, experiences. By pairing narrative theory with cognitive approaches to literature, especially the psychoanalytic concept of

intersubjectivity, I highlight the ethical possibilities of this new genre. Recognizing the nuances of the braided narrative not only allows us, as critics, to see similarities between novels usually read separately, such as Erdrich's and Krauss's, but also draws our attention to the way this narrative technique can train us, as readers, in a particular form of ethics—one that requires us to hold different, sometimes conflicting, perspectives in our minds simultaneously.

What is it about child-narrators that allow them to address such challenging social issues and earn such popularity and acclaim? How do these child-narrators seem to touch us even as they raise such fraught social problems? How does the narrative strategy of a child's voice move readers to see our shared world differently? What difference does it make to twine the voices of children together with other, distinct narrators in the braided narrative? "A Child's Call" traces how the child-narrators motivate affective responses that lay the foundation for ethical interventions. Reorienting the reading of contemporary American literature around the figure of a child and the braided narrative may help us imagine our way through some of our gravest social problems. While the violence of our society results from a history of subjugation and hate, there is, as Erdrich says of the legal victory associated with *The Round House*, "a slim margin of hope for justice." Perhaps, the perspective of the child, paired with the critical harmony of multiple voices in the braided narratives, can help readers learn to read the world differently. As Claudia says at the beginning of Morrison's first novel, "[T]here s really nothing more to say—except why. But since why is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in how" (6).

CHAPTER ONE: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

"Incident"

Once riding in old Baltimore,
Heart-filled, head-filled with glee,
I saw a Baltimorean
Keep looking straight at me.

Now I was eight and very small,
And he was no whit bigger,
And so I smiled, but he poked out
His tongue, and called me, "Ni-----."

I saw the whole of Baltimore
From May until December:
Of all the things that happened there
That's all that I remember.

— Countee Cullen (1925)

Incidents like the one narrated in Countee Cullen's poem mark much literature and life in twentieth-century United States. The hostile enjambment of racist hate interrupts the gleeful, innocent nursery rhyme of childhood. The Baltimorean child's slur, heavy with the un-absolved history that he might not know, colors both the speaker and his memories of that old city. Cullen is not alone in turning to his childhood to communicate the harm caused by social structures: sociologist-visionary W.E.B. DuBois, novelist-philosopher Toni Morrison, and poet-activist-theorist Audre Lorde, offer similar encounters in their various genres to help readers understand and resist the mechanisms of racial antagonisms. Beginning with

these four childhood scenes will help trace the theoretical background of "A Child's Call." First, the engine oil of white supremacy is the gaze—the look of white people simultaneously enacts race, recall the repetition of "look, a Negro!" in Franz Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks* (1967), and renders the resulting power structure seemingly outside the looker. As many scholars have explained, race has been constructed in the United States through laws, social mores, and fiction, but it is both perpetuated through and rendered invisible through perverted modes of vision. Second, while the gazing white people might be ignorant of the force and history of their own hateful stares, the people who become the target of those glares understand the mechanics of society's racial rubric almost immediately. The "gift" of seeing the invisible structure that renders the racial hierarchy of the U.S. in full color manifests instantly for the children in these opening interactions. As is most clear in Morrison's scene, it is more difficult for adults, especially those who profit from these power structures, to see this uneven logic that organizes our society. Third, and most important, it is not only in childhood that this "revelation first bursts upon one" as DuBois says, but also it is from the perspective of a child that these theorists, and many others, choose to share that knowledge (1). "A Child's Call" questions not only why the verbal emerges as an important sphere to address a problem that clings to the visual, but also, why the voice of the child proves an effective narrative strategy for addressing issues of race in the United States.

First, at the beginning of the twentieth-century, W.E.B. DuBois tells a story from his own childhood to introduce his theory of the double consciousness. DuBois recalls,

> In a wee wooden schoolhouse, something put it into the boys' and girls' heads to buy gorgeous visiting-cards—ten cents a package—and exchange. The exchange was merry, till one girl, a tall newcomer, refused my card, —

> refused it peremptorily, with a glance. Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil. (2)

DuBois's school-hood classmate communicates racist contempt with a glance. Young Dubois understands in an instant the full breadth of knowledge communicated in this gaze, a hatred and hierarchy seemingly imperceptible to those who look. The meanness and meaning of this refusal strikes DuBois with the reality of "the problem of the Twentieth Century… the problem of the color-line," a problem he will spend his life explaining and solving (v). His adult self explains, "the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, — a world which yields him to true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world" (2). Metaphors of vision pervade DuBois's explanation of the double consciousness. While the white glance communicates racism, it cannot see through the veil, a one-way mirror that affords those within the ability and curse to see double. In DuBois's analysis, Black folk can see simultaneously the society that constructs blackness and the world inside the veil. He writes, "[i]t is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (2). DuBois situates his lived experience as "bone of the bone and flesh of the flesh of them that live within the Veil" as a central component of his sociological and philosophical intervention in *The Souls of Black Folk*.

Second, in her first novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970), Toni Morrison imagines an interracial encounter from the 1940s. As mentioned in the introduction, eleven-year-old Pecola visits a shop to buy candy:

The gray head of Mr. Yacobowski looms up over the counter. He urges his eyes out of his thoughts to encounter her. Blue eyes. Blear-drooped. Slowly, like Indian summer moving imperceptibly toward fall, he looks toward her. Somewhere between retina and object, between vision and view, his eyes drew back, hesitate, and hover. At some point in time and space he senses that he need not waste the effort of a glance. He does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see. How can a fifty-two-year-old white immigrant store-keeper with the taste of potatoes and beer in his mouth, his mind honed on the doe-eyed Virgin Mary, his sensibilities blunted by a permanent awareness of loss, *see* a little black girl? Nothing in his life even suggested that the feat was possible, not to say desirable or necessary.

"Yeah?"

She looks up at him and sees the vacuum where curiosity ought to lodge. And something more. The total absence of human recognition—the glazed separateness. She does not know what keeps his glance suspended. Perhaps because he is grown, or a man, and she a little girl. But she has seen interest, disgust, even anger in grown male eyes. Yet this vacuum is not new to her. It has an edge; somewhere in the bottom lid is the distaste. She has seen it lurking in the eyes of all white people. So. The distaste must be for her, her blackness. All things in her are flux and anticipation. But her blackness is static and dread. And it is the blackness that accounts for, that creates, the vacuum edged with distaste in white eyes. (italics in original 48-49)

Morrison understands racism as "a profound neurosis" that presents first as a perversion of perception.[12] The white adult's droopy eyes cannot focus on the Black child's form. The failure of recognition occurs not in the cognitive processes of pious Mr. Yacobowski's mind but in that indeterminate "time and space" before her image reaches his retinas.[13] He cannot respond to the "flux and anticipation" that animate the eleven-year-old with the implicit invitation for human engagement because his eyes themselves "d[aw] back, hesitate, and hover." The blue eyes of the store-keeper, the blue eyes of the Mary Jane candies Pecola buys, the blue eyes of baby dolls, the blue eyes of little white girls, and the bluest eyes of Pecola's deepest wish become both the location of and figure for the neurosis of white supremacy. By describing racism as a perversion of perception, Morrison not only traces the

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[12] While racism is also many other things—a cultural logic, a political system, a power dynamic—I find Morrison's formulation as a psychological disorder compelling because it captures how white supremacy is illogical even as it structures and informs the history of Western rational thought. Like a virus that mutates and evolves to continue infecting host organisms, white supremacy adapts to outlast the various political institutions, like slavery, that helped to forge it and shifts to survive the movements that sought to destroy it. Like the complexes psychoanalysis uses to describe the development of familial relations, racism can play a large role in explaining uneven and deeply entrenched societal relationships. Further, framing white supremacy as an ailment helps explain how we can still be carriers—think white privilege—even as we try to recover from it.

[13] Morrison's allusion to his immigrant history and acquaintance with loss demonstrates an incisive analysis of the complexities of assimilation politics WWII era United States when she sets her novel.

wily way white supremacy structures a skewed set of standards situating itself as epitome, but also how this happens seemingly outside of the mind or before cognition of white people and others who adopt this mode of sight. In dwelling on the image of the eye through the figurative language of literature, Morrison upends the paradoxical complicity of language in white supremacy—although marked racial differences function in part because they seem apparent in the visual register, their significance is rendered through language and can only exist because of the symbolic order. Morrison's decision to address this problem of sight in a novel, one of the least visual modes of expression, highlights the power of language and harnesses it to resist and expose what it once simultaneously made possible, papered over, and ignored. Further, in *The Bluest Eye*, the figure of the child and child-narrators become the means to make visible the damaging way that language and sight intersect to construct race in the United States.

Finally, in the 1980s Audre Lorde wrote, "I don't like to talk about hate. I don't like to remember the cancellation and hatred, heavy as my wished-for death, seen in the eyes of so many white people from the time I could see" (147). Like Pecola who finds "the absence of human recognition" in the droopy eyes of the shopkeeper, Lorde has been able to see her own destruction in the eyes of white people as long as she could see (49). In order to explain the hatred that she does not want to talk about, Lorde shares a childhood memory. As she and her mother board a subway train in New York City,

> My mother spots an almost seat, pushes my little snowsuited body down. On one side of me a man reading a paper. On the other, a woman in a fur hat staring down at me. Her mouth twitches as she stares and then her gaze drops down, pulling mine with it. Her leather-gloved hand plucks at the line where

> my new blue snowpants and her sleek fur coat meet. She jerks her coat closer to her. I look. I do not see whatever terrible thing she is seeing on the seat between us – probably a roach. But she has communicated her horror to me. It must be something very bad from the way she's looking, so I pull my snowsuit closer to me away from it, too. When I look up the woman is still staring at me, her nose holes and eyes huge. And suddenly I realize there is nothing crawling up the seat between us; it is me she doesn't want her coat to touch. The fur brushes past my face as she stands with a shudder and holds on to a strap in the speeding train. (147-8)

Without a word, this white-woman, dressed in dead animals, communicates hate clearly to the small child that Lorde once was. The white woman's gestures communicate more than words can. "Her mouth twitches"; her fingers "pluck"; her hand "jerks"; her nostrils flare and her eyes widen; she "shudders." The small child, protected from snow, but not from white loathing, registers the adjectives and animals associated with these actions: "terrible," "roach," "horror," "very bad." But this child, so small her mother still can fit her in an "almost seat," already understands that she is the object of this repulsion, the recipient of this disgust: "it is me she doesn't want her coat to touch." This white woman executes her hatred with a glance, a weighty stare that not only lowers young Lorde's eyes, a gesture associated with shame, but stays with her into adulthood, shaping her understanding of race and affect.

These four opening scenes foreshadow the work of the novels discussed in this project. They set the stage with the joyous potential of childhood: like the "heart-filled, head-filled with glee" of Cullen's speaker, DuBois's describes his playground exchange as "merry," and Morrison fills Pecola with "flux and anticipation" (2,2,49). Cullen and Lorde

underscore the youthful innocence with their style: Cullen writes in simple metered rhyme and Lorde uses sentence fragments to frame the other passengers. All four writers emphasize the smallness of the child, a gesture that alludes both to their vulnerability and their potential to reflect society in miniature. Cullen describes himself as "very small" and the other child as "no whit bigger" (5,6). In her passage, Morrison refers to Pecola as "a little black girl" and "a little girl" instead of by her name, and Lorde opens her anecdote with her "little snowsuited body" (48, 147). DuBois's description "wee wooden schoolhouse" recalls the words and playthings of small children (2). The repeated emphasis on the small size of these children highlights their fragility and issues an invitation for protection and care that do not occur within the scene. Instead, these four short incidents communicate what it feels like to be the target of racism: for Cullen, the eight-year-old's slur blocks all his other memories. For the other three, looks alone accomplish the antagonism: "a glance" shuts DuBois out from "their world," Pecola experiences a "static and dread" in the vacuous stare of the shopkeeper and recognizes the "disgust" she has seen "lurking in the eyes of all white people," and young Lorde sees her own "cancellation" in the gaze of "so many white people" (2, 49, 147). These writers juxtapose the youthful vulnerability with the macro-historical brutality of racist hate.

Importantly, the glaring white people don't seem conscious of their own cruelty—with the exception of "Incident," these scenes render white supremacy a function of vision not of cognition, and even that Baltimorean child cannot have fully understood his hate. Part of the poignancy of "Incident" stems from the fact that the Cullen's bigoted child cannot fully know the violent history that informs his vulgarity. Like the pointing child in *Black Skin, White Masks,* the eight-year-old echoes and perpetuates the adult antagonisms.

DuBois's classmate dismisses his visiting-card without a thought, a mechanical rather than a considered response. Likewise, Morrison frames Mr. Yacobowski's failure to recognize Pecola as a problem of perception; the choice not to see the child occurs outside his mind, "[s]omewhere between retina and object, between vision and view" (49). Finally, the furred white lady in Lorde's subway car reacts to the child with the same knee-jerk disgust she would a roach. The slur, the rejection, the vacuum or recognition, and the horror are performances that racialize and damage their targets, but, in at least three of the four scenes, these performances have stagnated into habits of sight. I make this observation not to excuse these white people of their cruelty, but rather to underscore a pernicious attribute of white supremacy: it can perpetuate itself, as DuBois says, "peremptorily, with a glance," but seemingly without a thought (2).

While all of these incidents illustrate instances of individual prejudice and take place before the civil rights movement, the analyses mounted by these authors hold true through the era of "color-blindness" that dominated discourse after the 1950s and 60s. The seemingly progressive strategy of not seeing color has the same effect of outsourcing responsibility for and understanding of the racial hierarchy that still informs life in the United States. In place of the unmasked contempt of the woman on the subway, the vacant glances of unseeing people like Mr. Yacobowski populate a color-blind society. Sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva explains,

> [C]olor-blind racism serves today as the ideological armor for a covert and institutionalized system in the post-Civil Rights era. And the beauty of this new ideology is that it aids in the maintenance of white privilege without fanfare, without naming those who it subjects and those who it rewards. (3-4)

Color-blind racism still depends on the politics of sight, but instead of seeing perversely, this ideology professes not to see color at all.

Covert color-blind racism damages as much as much as overt, prejudiced stares because both perpetuate and hide the mechanics of white supremacy, ignoring while participating in the history through which racial hierarchies were constructed and maintained. In the late 80s and early 90s, scholars in sociology and legal studies began to trace the way race in the United States has been historically and socially constructed. In 1986, sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant made the crucial, and today standard, proposal that race is not a stagnant, essential attribute of biology or ancestry, but rather a contextually determined system of concepts. Omi and Winant "use the term *racial formation* to refer to the process by which social, economic and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by which they are in turn shaped by racial meanings" (61). Consider, for example, a study conducted by the Pew Research Center on "How the Census Race Categories Have Changed Over Time." The study assigns a color to each of the "races" recorded by the 2010 census: White (blue), Black, African-American, or Negro (pink), Some Other Race (gray), American Indian or Alaska Native (yellow), Asian (green), Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander (brown), and Hispanic (orange). The interactive website allows viewers to select a decade to see how the census accounted for these races historically. While the Pew study uses contemporary understandings of race and ethnicity to organize their study, the census only began using the term "race" in 1880 when social Darwinism and eugenics projects gained in influence.[14] For the majority of the nineteenth century, the census stuck

[14] The United States Census Bureau publishes their questionnaires online at https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/index_of_questions/2010.html.

with the language of the visual register and asked about a person's "color." From 1790, when the U.S. began taking a census, until 1820, the division was less coded—instead of "color" it counted "other free persons" and "slaves." The only category that has consistent across the centuries is "White," and we will see how the privileges associated with that race have been carefully maintained at the expense of "other persons."

We can grasp Omi and Winant's concept of the fluidity of racial formation by tracing the red category, which the Pew study identifies as "Black, African American, or Negro" from 1790 when the nation first began taking a census. From 1790 until 1850, the census had two different red categories: "slaves" or "free colored persons," introducing "colored," as we have seen in 1820.[15] In 1850, the census began to distinguish "Black" and "Mulatto" people, dividing the categories of both free and enslaved people accordingly. The 1870 census reflected the abolition of slavery by eliminating the category of "slave," but by 1890, perhaps a repercussion of the failure of reconstruction, the census added "Quadroon" and "Octoroon." 1900 witnessed a consolidation of all these categories into "Black (Negro or of Negro descent)." While the 1910 and 1920 returned to the "Black"/ "Mulatto" division, after 1930, the category solidified again as "Negro" or "Black or Negro" until the present. The history of chattel slavery helps us to understand how crucial shifting from one category such as "slave" to "Black" can be. The proliferation of racial categories in at the end of the reconstruction era through the additional categories of "Quadroon" and "Octoroon," which indicate one quarter and one eighth "Black" heritage respectively, reveals an effort to

[15] In 1820 the census began distinguishing between "free-colored males and females" to reflect the gendered distinction the census had for whites at that time. The census stopped including gender in the racial category after 1850.

reaffirm a racial hierarchy—to construct race. The past half-century has also witnessed a marked increase in racial categories, which reflects contemporary efforts at racialization. Although the census allows Asian Americans to distinguish among seven categories, Hawaiian/ Pacific Islanders to choose among four, and Latinos to choose among four, the Pew study assigns each of these broad categories one color. Notably, while the Pew study assigns Latinos the single color orange, the census recognizes that many Latino people identify as white.[16] That the census needs to ask a second question to determine whether those White people are of "Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish" suggests a contemporary effort to construct race.

While the census illustrates the historical malleability of racial categories, a multitude of other factors, especially the law, contribute to racial construction. Philosopher Charles Mills's theory of "Racial Contract" offers a broad explanation of this phenomenon. Drawing on enlightenment-era ideas of a "social contract," Mills proposes that our modern world actually functions through a "Racial Contract," noting that "the social contract tradition that has been central to Western political theory, is not a contract between everybody ('we the people'), but between just the people who count, the people who really are people ('we the white people')" (3). The United States Constitution, to which Mills alludes, acts as a Racial Contract not only because only white men drafted and signed it, but also because it explicitly

[16] In granting U.S. citizenship to former Mexican citizens, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo* 1848, effectively recognized these people as White. History shows that White settlers often did not treat the Mexican American landowners as such, but they were counted as White in the census. According to the Pew study, the census introduced "Mexican" in 1930, but abandoned the category until 1970.

excludes "exclude[s] Indians not taxed, [and] three fifths of all other Persons" from counting as people in this new nation (Article 1 Section 2). This exclusion made possible the founding of a "free" nation on stolen land through the labor of enslaved people. Mills asserts "the general purpose of the [Racial] Contract is always the differential privileging of whites as a group with respect to nonwhites as a group, the exploitation of their bodies, land, and resources, and the denial of equal socioeconomic opportunities to them" (11). Mills tense affirms that despite increased inclusion of nonwhite people in the nation's democratic process (such as the abolition of slavery, the extension of citizenship, etc.) the domination at the core of the contract continues. Importantly, Mills joins DuBois, Morrison, and Lorde in identifying the essential role of perverted perception plays in maintaining racial hierarchies; he writes the Racial Contract "requires a certain schedule of structured blindness and opacities in order to establish and maintain the white polity" (19). In order for the "Racial Contract" to work, white people "ha[ve] to learn to see the world wrongly, but with the assurance that this set of mistaken perceptions will be validated by white epistemic authority whether religious, or secular" (18).

Ian F. Haney López contributes to the project of Critical Race Theory to expose the way U.S. law has played a central role in constructing race in his book *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (1996). Haney López isolates citizenship as a key crucible for the formation of whiteness because, from 1790 when Congress first passed a naturalization law until 1952, whiteness was a prerequisite for citizenship. While the fourteenth amendment did extend citizenship to Black people and reiterate birth-right citizenship, immigrants still had to claim to be white in order to naturalize. Haney López focuses on the landmark cases of *Ozawa v. United States* (1922) where the court denied a Japanese

American man citizenship because "numerous scientific authorities" classified him as a member of the "yellow race" and *United States v. Thind* (1923) where the court refused an Indian man citizenship despite his membership in the "Caucasian" race (85, 90). As Haney López charts the court's shift from "science" to the "understanding of the common man" to define whiteness, he identifies a consistent investment in that identity, despite—or because of—its elusiveness, both in terms of who gets to claim it and how it is defined (90). In 1993, legal scholar Cheryl Harris made the compelling argument that the investment in whiteness is actually a property interest. Harris outlines the history that "attempted the legal conversion of Blacks into objects of property" and that barred Native Americans from possessing their own lands (1721). These two seemingly separate regimes of domination conspired to construct whiteness as "the characteristic, the attribute, the property of free human beings" and "solely through being white that property could be acquired and secured under law. Only whites possessed whiteness, a highly valued and exclusive form of property" (1721, 1724). Even as civil rights legislation, such as *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) worked toward formal equality, Harris asserts, it also rendered the uneven patterns of wealth and privilege that developed from whiteness as property into a neutral status quo. Her discussion of affirmative action cases such as *Regents of the University of California v Bakke* (1978) shows how the modern iteration of "whiteness as property" is the expectation of the privileges of whiteness and the false belief that those benefits are neutral and natural.[17] George Lipsitz

[17] Harris explains, "[t]reating whiteness as the basis for a valid claim to special constitutional protection is a further legitimation of whiteness as identity, status, and property. Treating white identity as no different from any other group identity when, at its core, whiteness is

builds on Harris's project in *The Possessive Investment of Whiteness* (1998) by detailing the way policies such as urban renewal and practices such as the Federal Housing Administration's white preference in awarding home loans build wealth and opportunities for white people at the expense of communities of color, even after the 1960s era celebrated for progress. Lipsitz frames some white people's inability to see this sociological and economic reality as a problem of sight: "[t]he gap between white perception and minority experience can have explosive consequences" (20).

This discussion of the construction of race as a strategy of subjugation does not intend to evacuate racial categories of their historic, cultural significance as modes of self-identification and collective attachment. Communities that would be racialized in the context of the United States always already had distinct cultures, governmental systems, and religions that would continue despite the state's efforts to block them out. For instance, historian Cedric Robinson points to "four centuries or more" of resistance to slavery to describe the "specifically African character" of what he will come to call the "Black Radical Tradition" (5). Robinson writes,

> Resistances were formed through the meanings that Africans brought to the New World as their cultural possession; meanings sufficiently distinct from the foundations of Western ideas to be remarked upon over and over by the European witness of their manifestations; meanings enduring and powerful enough to survive slavery to become the basis of an opposition to it. With

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based on racial subordination ratifies existing white privilege by making it the referential base line. (1775)

> Western society as a condition, that tradition almost naturally assumed a theoretical aspect as well. (5)

The Black Radical Tradition both perpetuates an African legacy and is shaped by its resistance to Western projects of dominance. Even as plantation slavery attempted to destroy African customs and to prevent kinship structures in both the immediate and extended family, enslaved people maintained their heritage through new forms of art such as the Sorrow Songs and the oral tradition and developed systems of attachment that affirm connections to non-relatives as well as relatives. Race not only allows for domination in this particular context but also signifies and contains cultural values and practices.

The incredible importance of the diverse epistemologies and traditions that inhabit, sometimes uncomfortably, constructed racial categories can be clarified by turning to the context of Indigenous Peoples. Linguists estimate that at contact (1492), over three hundred distinct Indigenous languages, belonging to fifty different language families (striking when compared to the three in Western Europe), were spoken in what is today claimed by the U.S. and Canada (Mithun). Each of these languages represents at least one, but often more, nation, distinct in culture, political system, religion, etc. Many tribes have maintained their history and traditions and function as sovereign nations, albeit with some restrains, within the borders of the settler states. At the same time, the colonial practices of the U.S. and Canada, even while making treaties with individual nations, sought to subsume all under the category "Indian." Facing similar projects of conquest—genocide, land theft, boarding schools, and assimilation policies—forced a shared history and identity for Indigenous peoples that exists along side their unique tribal affiliations.

Louise Erdrich teaches her readers about the complicated interplay between an imposed category and the shared experiences that constitute culture through the child-narrator of *The Round House* (2012). Joe Coutts explains,

> You can't tell if a person is Indian from a set of fingerprints. You can't tell from a name. You can't even tell from a local police report. You can't tell from a picture. From a mug shot. From a phone number. From the government's point of view, the only way you can tell an Indian is an Indian is to look at that person's history. There must be ancestors from way back who signed some document or were recorded as Indians by the U.S. government, someone identified as a member of a tribe. And then after that you have to look at that person's blood quantum, how much Indian blood they've got that belongs to one tribe. In most cases, the government will call the person an Indian if their blood is one quarter—it usually has to be from one tribe. But that tribe has also got to be federally recognized. In other words, being an Indian is in some ways a tangle of red tape.
>
> On the other hand, Indians know other Indians without the need for a federal pedigree, and this knowledge—like love, sex, or having or not having a baby—has nothing to do with government. (29-30)

This passage, like much of Erdrich's prose, is informed by a careful attention to history. The first few sentences reject the traditional, stereotypical clues of identification such as fingerprints, physical appearance, and names, but at the same time Joe's examples of fingerprints, police reports, and mug shots belie an institution that still clings to the visual register to profile Native people. The remainder of the paragraph renders a complicated legal

history, some of which Eric Cheyfitz outlines in the first part of *The Columbia Guide to American Indian Literatures of the United States Since 1945* (2006), through the vocabulary of a thirteen-year-old. Joe mentions to the 19th century fetish "blood quantum," which Cheyfitz explains alongside the Dawes Allotment Act, which parceled and privatized land belonging to many tribes, a policy that cost these tribes nearly two thirds of their land.[18] As Joe explains, the government still requires Dawes Rolls or other historical documentation to prove that someone is Indian or to deny them that identity. Lack of federal recognition can have damaging consequences; for instance, in *Mashpee Tribe v New Seabury Court* (1979), Federal Court refused the Mashpee's efforts to reclaim their land because they could not

[18] The Allotment Act caused such dramatic losses for a few reasons. First, the U.S. government allotted certain individuals 160-acre parcels of land. While this seems like a lot of space, the number of allotments received did not nearly cover the amount of land previously belonging to the tribe; the federal government claimed the "surplus land." Second, if the government found the recipient of the Allotment "incompetent," the government could sell the land or appoint a white steward of the land, who could control it and ultimately sell it. Finally, unaware of the importance of property in the capitalist system many people chose to sell their Allotment land. Cheyfitz cites John Collier, the commissioner of Indian Affairs who states that through these policies, "the total of Indian landholdings has been cut from 138,000,000 acres in 1887 to 48,000,000 acres in 1934" (Cheyfitz cited from Cohen 216). Not all tribes were allotted.

prove tribal status.[19] While the hefty first paragraph of this passage speaks to the laborious efforts of the U.S. government to construct race, the second brief paragraph affirms a different, more self-determined understanding of what it means to be Indian. While Erdrich does not detail the specific content of this "knowledge," perhaps because it wouldn't make sense or doesn't belong to those who don't already have it, she does imply that it has to do with attachment and interpersonal connection.

This detour into Critical Race Theory does not stray as far from the opening incidents as it may seem—rather Cullen, DuBois, Morrison, and Lorde know that racism is both constructed and interpersonal. Each writer gestures to this socio-political landscape by situating their scene at the sites where racial equality has been legally and socially contested. Cullen and Lorde locate their interracial encounters on streetcar and subway train respectively, evoking *Plessy v Ferguson* (1896), which upheld segregation policies. Although Cullen and Lorde's take place before *Brown v Board of Education* (1954) overturned *Plessy*, the fact that the cruelty they describe occurred in integrated spaces suggests that that formal equality is only part of the solution. DuBois's memory, which takes place in the institution at stake in *Brown*, also foreshadows the limits of integration. Morrison's story alludes to the lunch counter sit-ins even though her racist shopkeeper serves her young protagonist. By locating their scenes at sites that these authors know or foresee will be sites of contestation, they not only acknowledge the power of the law in creating change, but also mark its limitations. These scholars use the voice and figure of a child to

[19] Cheryl Harris and Ian Haney Lopez both refer to this case as a key example of how racial constriction facilitates the accumulation of white wealth. In 2007, the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe gained federal recognition.

invite readers into their political analyses and to move readers to want to participate in the change they herald. DuBois's childhood anecdote stands as a way of introducing not only his theory of the double consciousness, but also his sociological investigation into the macro processes that kept African Americans subjugated after the Civil War. Lorde places her memory among several others in an essay that interrogates the way large social structures infect individual emotional relationships. Morrison turns to fiction to make personal the large-scale institutional problem of racism. As we saw in the introduction, she couches her motivation for writing the *The Bluest Eye* in structural terms: "I wanted to show how painful this constructed horrible racism was on the most vulnerable people in the society, girls, black girls, poor girls. And that it really and truly could hurt you."[20]

That DuBois, Lorde, and Morrison turn to narrative as a way of drawing readers into their political analyses suggests that there is something about that mode that cannot be accomplished as well if at all in another type of writing. An important aspect that sets narrative apart, I argue, is the attention to the particular, the personal, and the emotional. While all three authors understand and communicate insights about the power systems that structure society, they all know that beginning with an individual child, even if that child already represents the adult writer, will engage readers in ways macro analyses will not. For me, the increased attention and engagement invited by the particular person is best described as ethical—other people, a stranger, a friend, a relative, call to us, making an appeal that precedes our awareness of them. Levinas uses the particularity of the human face to explain this ethical attraction; he writes, "[t]he facing position, opposition par excellence, can be only a moral summons" and later, "the face opens the primordial discourse whose first word is

[20] Toni Morrison made this comment in an interview on "The Colbert Report" 11/19/2014.

obligation" (196, 201). The face of another person, which is both like our face and necessarily different, not only marks others as incommensurately distinct, but also burdens that difference with a "summons," "obligation" or responsibility. Unlike Levinas who finds the ethical pull between people dark and painful,[21] I believe particular personalities and situations inflect ethical relationships with different and diverse valances. For instance, we have all felt the imploring gaze of people asking for help on the street, and although they usually make their request in explicit sharpie on a cardboard sign, we can still feel their summons without reading it. Although the demand is different, my students report feeling a similar pull from me; when I look at them too intensely during class, they sometimes ask, "are you calling on me?" This sort of summons, albeit in a different register, resonates almost inescapably in the call of a child. The incidents that opened this chapter are painful in part because the white characters not only refuse, but don't even register the preexisting obligation carried in children's potential to be seen.

Importantly, there are two different dimensions occurring simultaneously in all these scenarios, and both are usually glossed as ethical. First, there is the relational pull between people, the call, the appeal, the summons. Second, there is an associated "ought," the content of the obligation the called to person should do, which is not necessarily the same as the content of the call itself. For instance, some might say that we ought not give money to people on the street who are likely to use it to buy drugs; that my student should not answer

[21] For Levinas, the ethical force that binds humans is dark and painful; he explains, "[t]he epiphany of the face brings forth the possibility of gauging the infinity of the temptation to murder, not only as a temptation to total destruction, but also as the purely ethical impossibility of the temptation and attempt" (199).

in class if she hasn't done the reading, and that the four Native men in *The Plague of Doves* ought not help the crying child because, if they do, the white settlers "will hang us for sure" (63). The anecdotes that open this chapter also function in both registers—DuBois's classmate fails to see his relational pull and she does not accept his card as she ought. Cullen's Baltimorean, on the other hand, feels some sort of call from the poem's speaker that attracts his gaze throughout the first few lines, but he responds to that invitation negatively by demeaning the speaker. Martha Nussbaum, in her close attention to Henry James, adopts a similar distinction. Expanding on James' claim in his introduction to *Princess Casamassima* (1908) that complete feeling embraces "power to be finely aware and richly responsible," Nussbaum calls the first ethical dimension, awareness or perception: "[i]t is seeing a complex, concrete reality in a highly lucid and richly responsive way; it is taking in what is there, with imagination and feeling" (152). For Nussbaum we do not necessarily feel the pull of another by default (the fur-coated lady on Lorde's subway car certainly did not), but rather we must train ourselves to be more attentive and aware, capacities the narrative arts especially enhance. Nussbaum, like James, pairs perception with responsibility, which she describes as "a highly context-specific and nuanced and responsive" action (152). The responsible response, for Nussbaum, "could not be captured in a description that fell short of the artistic (154). For Nussbaum both the ability to imagine another's experience, which is central to perception and attention, and the capacity for responsibility can be uniquely fostered by novels.

Like Nussbaum and others, I turn to narrative as an unparalleled mode that can help people to first feel and then consider the ethical tension associated with particular human attachments. As Nussbaum puts it "certain truths about human life can only be fittingly and

accurately stated in the language and forms characteristic of the narrative artist" (5). What the face does for Levinas' theory, narrative does for Adam Zachary Newton. Newton explains in *Narrative Ethics* (1995), "narrative situations create an immediacy and force, …[a] call, and response that bind narrator and listener, author and character, or reader and text" (13). Just as Levinas asserts that our ethical responsibility to another precedes our recognition of them,[22] Newton explains, "[l]ike persons, texts present and expose themselves; the claim they make on me does not begin with dedicating myself to them, but rather precedes my discovery of the claim" (22). In affirmation of Nussbaum's observation, this argument about claims that preexist recognition and discovery is clearer perhaps in narrative than it is in philosophical texts. In *The History of Love*, the first narrator Leo cries out with an appeal to be seen: "[A]ll I want is not to die on a day when I went unseen" (4). This plea precedes the reader's discovery of it in the sense that Krauss published his words on that page regardless of whether any individual reader chooses to open the novel or not. Even in narrative situations that don't request recognition as explicitly as Leo does, a similar call echoes insofar as all novels are invitations to be read. In narrative and novels, the appeal transcends the plea of particular characters—instead writers create a series of plot

[22] In *Otherwise Than Being Or Beyond Essence*, Levinas writes, "[t]he neighbor concerns me before all assumption, all commitment consented to or refused. I am bound to him, him who is, however, the first one of the scene, not signaled, unparalleled; I am bound to him before any liaison is contracted. He orders me before being recognized. Here there is a relation of kinship outside of all biology, 'against all logic.' It is not because the neighbor would be recognized as belonging to the same genus as me that he concerns me. He is precisely other. The community with him beings in my obligation to him. The neighbor is a brother" (87).

circumstances, discourse tensions, and story instabilities; they develop relationships among characters, between reader and characters, and between the reader and the story world in an effort to share a feeling and then a sense of responsibility that cannot be engendered in any other way.[23]

The intersection of interpersonal ethics and large-scale socio-political critique is the key site where the texts discussed in this project do their work. Racial formation in the United States is always already an ethical project in that it has systematically created structures that refuse the summons of others—recall that the 1790 census distinguished "White" people from "other free persons" and "slaves." As we have seen, the beneficiaries

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[23] Walter Benjamin offers another example of a call that precedes recognition or even existence when he writes, "[b]y giving names, parents dedicate their children to God; the names they give do not correspond—in a metaphysical rather than etymological sense—to any knowledge, for they name newborn children" (69). In place of knowledge, the names that we call our children carry with them inflections of expectations and obligations. In *The History of Love*, for instance, Alma's parents name her "after every girl" in the book-within-a-book also called *The History of Love* (35). Although her parents do not know that the protagonist in the fiction-within-a-fiction was based on Leo's child-hood sweetheart, Alma feels reality of the love captured in the prose as a summons. After reading Leo's novel, Alma writes, "the more I thought about it, the more I thought that she also must have been someone. Because how could [the author] have written so much about love without being in love himself. With someone in particular" (108). Alma treats this discovery as a call; almost as soon as Alma decides her namesake could have been real she decides "to look for her" (109).

of this racial order have developed strategies for outsourcing responsibility for this system to the ocular—either by accomplishing it with a glance or by claiming blindness to it. The particular scenes of interpersonal, interracial encounters reaffirm the ethical nature of socio-political power structures. I began with excerpts from sociology and philosophy to show that the strategy of turning to a particular child's voice is not limited to fiction. The remainder of the project concentrates on narrative fiction and novels in particular because, like Nussbaum, I feel that this mode is most apt to describe responsible responses. Before turning in the remaining chapters to the major texts of "A Child's Call," I will dwell on a patchwork of theories from post-Freudian psychoanalysis and the intellectual tradition started by 1980s feminists like Audre Lorde.

WHERE DO ETHICS COME FROM?

> Deep in the past during a spectacular cruel raid upon an isolate Ojibwe village mistaken for hostile during the scare over the starving Sioux, a dog bearing upon its back a frame-board tikinaagan enclosing a child in moss, velvet, embroideries of beads, was frightened into the vast carcass of the word west of the Ottertail river. A cavalry soldier, spurred to human response by the sight of the dog, the strapped-on child, both vanishing into the distance, followed and did not return.
>
> — Louise Erdrich "Father's Milk"
>
> "The radical potential of the word 'mother' comes after the 'm.' It is the space that 'other' takes in our mouths when we say it. We are something else."
>
> — Alexis Pauline Gumbs

In Louise Erdrich's short story "Father's Milk," which opens *Antelope Wife* (1998) and *Antelope Woman* (2016), the sight of a baby and a dog move a cavalry soldier to defect from the genocidal army. In her later novel *The Plague of Doves* (2008), an infant's cry calls a murderer to stop his bloody rampage, and in *The Round House* (2012) the safety of a toddler releases the testimony that identifies and condemns the rapist. Erdrich's description of the pull between potential caregiver and desperate child captures the ethical situation central to this project— a tension between people that bears a sense responsibility even if it is undefined.[24] This section uses this opening scene from "Father's Milk" as well as another instance of adoption in *Tracks* to introduce some key terms that will provide a foundation to "A Child's Call." The moment that precipitates the soldier's turn from violence demonstrates feminist psychoanalyst Bracha Ettiger's theory of the "matrixial," a sphere of interpersonal interconnection and links that provides a supplementary model of subject formation to traditional phallus-oriented theories. The cavalryman's care of the adopted infant demonstrates a form of what Alexis Pauline Gumbs, in the tradition of Audre Lorde, describes as "radical mothering." In the 1980s, Lorde proposed "mothering ourselves" as a model for positive interpersonal relationships, a mutual affirmation that many of the novels discussed represent in the friendship of their characters and foster among their readers. Understanding how novels might influence their readers can best be imagined through Jessica Benjamin's theory of "intersubjectivity," which builds Donald Winnicott's concept of

[24] Levinas understands an ethical appeal in this sense. He describes this relation as "an unexceptionable responsibility, preceding every free consent, every pact, every contract" (*Otherwise Than Being Or Beyond Essence* 88).

"potential space." Both psychoanalytic concepts harmonize with Lorde's proposition and together create a theoretical foundation for the project.

THE MATRIXIAL

If we move past the first paragraph of "Father's Milk," we see that the soldier began his turn before seeing the child. As he pulled his bayonet out of the crumpled body of the infant's grandmother, he cannot avoid the eyes of the dying woman: "[h]is gaze was drawn into hers and sank into the dark unaccompanied moment before his birth. There was a word she uttered in her language. A groan of heat and blood. He saw his mother, yanked the bayonet out with a huge cry, and began to run" (299). In a paradoxical description of the ethical bind between people, Erdrich describes the cavalryman as entering the eyes of his victim where he encounters his own isolation in the embryonic space of his mother's womb. The ability of the elder to connect with the soldier even in the moment of her murder pushes him to the time before his birth. While the semantic content of the dying woman's Ojibwe appeal is lost on him, the force of her word is not. In violent parallel to his own birth, he emerges from his union with the grandmother's gaze, separates his sword from her abdomen, and sees his own mother's face before running away from battle. "That was when he saw the dog," Erdrich continues, and the invitation of the orphaned infant gives shape and purpose to an action already begun. Erdrich's account of the ethical appeal sounded in the child's cry affirms that the claim of the other is an inverse and imperfect echo of one's own earliest dependency.

This epigraph illustrates the "matrixial" ethics that cause the solider to turn from the massacre and rescue the child, and, as the title implies, nurse her from his own breast. Feminist painter and psychoanalyst Bracha Ettinger has resurrected the Latin etymology of

"matrix" to propose a model of subjectivity based on our shared experiences in the womb. To put a complicated theory simply, Ettinger proposes the "matrixial" as a "supplementary possibility" to the phallus-oriented model of development and object-relations that has dominated psychoanalysis (47). Just as the dying woman's gaze recalls for the solider a pre-birth memory, Ettinger's theory of "[t]he matrixial is modeled on a certain conception of feminine/prebirth psychic intimate sharing, where the womb is conceived of as a shared psychic borderspace" (140). Ettiger posits the psychic connection between a fetus and its mother as a model for potential human relatedness not as a prerequisite or determining experience. In Erdrich's prose, the soldier encounters his own pre-natal memory *inside* the gaze of the dying woman. Later, the woman herself confesses in another character's dream that she "stared him back in time, to when he was defenseless, before his birth" (262). Knowledge of prenatal vulnerability facilitates the fleeting, but powerful connection between adults.

For Ettiger, the "matrixial" is a framework for understanding the way that human subjectivity is built on connections and linkages with others rather than separation from them. Ettiger explains,

> I have termed this layer the *matrixial stratum of subjectivization*, proposing a matrixial *subjectivity-as-encounter* as a beyond-the-phallus feminine field related (in both men and women) to plural, partial, and *shared* unconscious, trauma, phantasy, and desire having imaginary and symbolic impact (and not only an *ex-sistence* in the Real). (64)

While Ettiger is careful to articulate the relationship between the "matrixial" and previous psychoanalytic accounts of subject development, her theory offers both genders the

possibility of shared psychic experience—of interconnection and understanding, albeit partial and plural. In "Father's Milk," the death trauma of the dying woman imperfectly recalls the birth trauma of her murderer. Our experiences of partial connectedness in the womb make it possible for us to conceive of psychic relatedness as adults as well. Ettiger continues,

> I have suggested that if—alongside traces of objects—we conceive of traces of links and relations, from the angle of a *co-emerging I and non-I* prior to the I versus others, then there arises a different kind of passageway proper to these *links* (which are then not taken for *objects*), attributable to particular processes of *transformation*. (64)

In place of the other-as-object theory present in some schools psychoanalysis, Ettiger makes the feminist gesture of proposing traces of links, echoes of attachment, that begin as the uneven relationship between a mother and an unborn child, but can extend into a matrix of interconnection of the "*I*" with "Other unknown *non-I(s)*" (87). The soldier's impossible intrauterine memory and his mother's face frame the moment of the murder, the ethical claim the woman speaks in her own language and precede his desertion from the colonizing army and his care for the escaping infant.

Following Ettiger, I use "matrixial" in this project to describe the tension, the sense of connection between people, the potential for sharing and linking. Mr. Cunningham's awareness of the "matrixial" makes him suppress his patriarchal urge to "protect" the "wronged" white woman, and instead interact with the child. Ettiger affirms, "the matrix has ethical implications. In the phallus, we confront the impossibility of sharing trauma and phantasy, whereas in the matrix, to a certain extent, there is *an impossibility of not sharing* them" (89). In small echo of the way a fetus shares her mother's trauma, adults can become

aware of field of linkages among people and share part of each other's pain. The cavalry soldier adopts the grief of his victim, and, in the years to come, etches her word into his arm with a knife, pays her family his life savings in reparations, and kills himself on their floor. While these subsequent actions take the form of Christian, capitalist guilt, the reason he felt remorse at all is because his victim's gaze activated his awareness of the "matrixial." Before he got trapped in her eyes, he was killing almost gleefully, but sharing a part of her trauma changed the course of his life.

RADICAL MOTHERING

While the bind between the grandmother and the soldier gets forged in the matrix, the immediate behavior, the "ought," that results from the grandmother's final stare can be described as maternal in the most radical sense. The soldier turns from the masculine field of massacre, defects from the male army, fails the "White Father" as the stereotypical speech called the president, and follows the infant into the wilderness, a space feminized in much of Western literature. The child herself shows the soldier that he can nurse, an actual possibility as Erdrich asserts in an interview included at the end of the book.[25] When the child takes the man's nipple in her mouth, an act that comes to "fill[] him with a foolish tender joy," she illustrates the second epigraph to this section where activist-scholar Alexis Pauline Gumbs asserts "[t]he radical potential of the word 'mother' comes after the 'm'" (8). From the perspective of the cavalryman, the "others" who he was ordered to massacre have become a single "other" whom he will raise with care. The child who holds him in her mouth, who teaches his body how to lactate becomes the "link" in Ettiger's language that will redefine

[25] Erdrich comments "[t]here are several documented cases of male lactation…. I think it's a great idea. It would solve about half the problems in the world" (12).

who he is. As his enduring guilt shows, however, he will not forget his "link" to the grandmother.

In 2016, Gumbs and her co-editors, China Martens and Mai'a Williams published *Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Front Lines* (2016),[26] an anthology that they envisioned in the spirit of Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa's *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981). In her contribution to that anthology, Gumbs charts a radical sort of mothering that I try to embrace in this project:

> We are looking at mothering as an investment in the future that requires a person to change the status quo of their own lives, of their community and of the society as a whole again and again and again in the practice of affirming growing, unpredictable people who deserve a world that is better than what we can even imagine. (115)

For Gumbs, mothering is not about reproducing a little people in our image or perpetuating societal norms, but rather about changing ourselves and our world to affirm "growing, unpredictable people" (115). I think Gumbs uses this phrase to both include those children our society currently targets with violence (such as those with racialized, queer, female, and differently abled bodies) and to account for future identifications that we cannot yet imagine. The cavalryman does not care for the child to continue his family line—his desertion from the army cut him off from all his other relatives. He does not rescue her because she has any trace of him inside her. Instead, baby's need reshapes his entire life—shifts his entire status

[26] and, like its "foremother," this collection of creative, philosophical, and activist writings resists and thinks beyond the white-supremacist agenda that still shapes society.

quo. He can no longer serve in an army that commits genocide and instead raises poultry to make a home for her.

While "A Child's Call" uses the "matrixial" to denote the ethical field that arises between people, I use Gumb's sense of "radical mothering" to describe one of the "oughts" that that tension might carry. While I understand "radical mothering" as a positive thing, I am not proposing it as a moral code or an ultimate good. Instead, I posit that "radical mothering" as a concept best informs the responsibility most at stake in the novels this project engages. For instance, the soldier demonstrates "radical mothering" when he rescues and nurses the child, but his act is still an act of kidnapping that has damaging consequences both for the girl and her birth mother, who also survives the massacre.

Gumbs concept of "radical mothering" does not function within the framework of "reproductive futurism" that Lee Edelman critiques. Edelman, like Robin Bernstein, recognizes the political currency of the figure of the child. Bernstein puts it best in the questions that initiate her book *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (2011); she asks "[w]hy is abstracted childhood so flexible that it can simultaneously bolster arguments for and against interracial marriage? How did childhood acquire so much affective weight that the exhortation to 'protect the children' seems to add persuasive power to almost any argument?" (2). Edelman contends that the figure of the child stands as representative image of a conservative, repetitive future; he writes, "[t]hat figural Child alone embodies the citizen as ideal, entitled to claim full rights to its future share in the nation's good, though always at the cost of limiting the rights "real" citizens are allowed" (11). While the idea of children as future citizens does play an important role in the formation and maintenance of nations, Edelman errors in his assumption that the "image of

the Child" can be contained in a single "coercive universalization" (11). Instead, we should join Bernstein in acknowledging that while "abstracted childhood" can serve as a wild card for any political cause, particular children—real or imagined—do specific symbolic work. Little Eva, Stowe's fictional child that Bernstein discusses, played such an important role in U.S. history not because she stood as the universal ideal for all children, or heralded a future citizen (since she died at the end of the novel, she couldn't bear more citizens, and if she had survived, she couldn't vote), but because she stood as a particular, angelic child. While I do identify common traits of child-narrators, this project, too focuses on particular children who, like the child-protagonists in the incidents that open this chapter, work because of their specificity. Part of the power of the child-narrators I discuss, is that they tap the proclivity to care that Edelman and Bernstein recognize, but marshal it for very specific reasons.

MOTHERING OURSELVES

In the 1980s, Audre Lorde, an inspiring figure for both Gumbs and me, proposed a radical type of mothering as a model of interpersonal relations. In writing about the specific anger that Black women might feel because of the hatred that structures our society,[27] Lorde proclaims that "[w]e can learn to mother ourselves" (172). Lorde's formulation not only calls for the "recognition and acceptance that we have come to expect only from our

[27] Lorde explains "Every Black woman in America has survived several lifetimes of hatred, where even in the candy store cases of our childhood, little brown nigggerbaby candies testified against us. We survived the wind-driven spittle on our child's shoe and pink flesh color bandaids, attempted rapes on rooftops, and the prodding fingers of the super's boy, seeing our girlfriends blown to bits in Sunday School, and we absorbed that loathing as a natural state" (156).

mommas" but also the affirmation of other Black women (159). In a context of violence and prejudice, maternal care can create one of the only spaces where Lorde locates the self-affirming love that makes life worth surviving.[28] Her theory seeks to extend this care from the figure of the mother to relationships among Black women. Instead of participating in the reproduction of society's power structures or converting hatred into resentment of other Black women, Lorde implores her readers to create, to birth, to care for something new. Claudia and her sister Frieda model a juvenile sort of "mothering ourselves" in *The Bluest Eye*. At the end of the novel, Claudia comments, "[n]obody paid us any attention, so we paid very good attention to ourselves" (191). The girls give each other the affirmation and interest that they cannot find from adults, a sort of care that might have changed Pecola's trajectory. Learning to "mother ourselves" is necessarily creative; Lorde explains "it means we must establish authority over our own definition, provide an attentive concern and expectation of growth which is the beginning of that acceptance we came to expect only from our mothers" (173). For Lorde and her adherents who edited *Revolutionary Mothering*, mothering requires both self-transformation and nurturance of others. Lorde explains, "[m]othering ourselves means learning to love what we have given birth to by giving definition to" (173). Lorde's theory requires intervention in the symbolic order as her imperatives "to establish authority" and "to define" imply, but also, and more important, she calls for an affective shift in the way

[28] Although, like Morrison, she takes seriously the way infanticide relates to maternal care. Lorde explains her commitment to caring for her daughter in such a hateful world: "[k]nowing I did not slit their throats at birth tear out the tiny beating heart with my own despairing teeth the way some sisters did in the slave ships chained to corpses and therefore I was committed to this very moment" (158).

women face each other. The changing of definitions is made possible by self-acceptance and attention and care of others. "Mothering each other," then, is a shift in the organization of human attachments.

Other feminists also chart the ways in which mothering contains within it a radical potential that manifests as empathy and facilitates different moral processes. In her revision of psychoanalytic development, psychoanalyst and scholar Nancy Chodorow proposes that "[g]irls emerge from [the pre-oedipal] period with a basis for 'empathy' built into their primary definition of self in a way that boys do not" (167). While boys in this conception of Western society are raised to overcome their primary attachment to their mother and eventually take the role of the father, girls, because of the identification with their mothers, "come to define and experience themselves as continuous with others" (169). Carol Gilligan's studies of psychological development build on this distinction to propose that men and women have different processes of moral reasoning. Gilligan explains, "[i]n their portrayal of relationships, women replace the bias of men toward separation with a representation of the interdependence of self and other, both in love and in work. By changing the lens of developmental observation from individual achievement to relationships of care, women depict ongoing attachment as the path that leads to maturity" (170). In their realism, the novels discussed in "A Child's Call" reflect this constructed gendered difference. Neither Joe Coutts in *The Round House* nor Jem Finch in *Mockingbird* believes that he caused the wrongs at the core of those novels although they both take responsibility for them. In *The Bluest Eye*, on the other hand, Claudia believes "it was my fault" that the marigolds did not grow and that Pecola lost her baby (5). While all the children engage ethically with

the events of the novels, the boys do see themselves as more individuated and the girls as more interconnected.

Like these feminists, I am committed to the feminine phrasing of mothering even though anyone can practice the activity because there is a power and a knowledge in the particular even if —and often because— that particular is born form histories of inequity and centuries of social evil.[29] The sexual violence that *The Round House* and *The Bluest Eye* address and resist has and continues to follow precisely these gendered lines as they intersect with race. If the problem stems from patriarchal systems of power, the solution might be born from a particular and resistant knowledge of maternal care. As Gumbs points out in the second epigraph, the word "mother" itself holds the "other" within it, naming our potential to recognize and care for someone who is different than us. The second wave white feminists also make strong arguments for the gendered term. We should call it "mothering" and not "parenting" because as Nancy Chodorow explains in her universalizing way, "[w]omen mother. In our society, as in most societies, women not only bear children. They also take primary responsibility for infant care, spend more time with infants and children than do men, and sustain primary emotional ties with infants" (3). Philosopher Sara Ruddick also insists on the feminine because we haven't "transcended" this gender hierarchy: "[s]ince the maternal and the womanly are politically and conceptually connected, a man who engages in mothering to some extent takes on the female condition and risks identification with the

[29] DuBois's theory of the double consciousness is another example of this. Even as he describes the pain of "ever feel[ing] his two-ness" that "dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" DuBois calls the double-consciousness as being "gifted with second-sight in this American world" (2).

feminine…. What is so terrible—or so wonderful—about that?" (45). Ruddick further points out that "father" is not the masculine corollary to "mother"—in Western society, fathering has historically had more to do with naming progeny into a social and symbolic order and establishing authority and law than mothering as Hortense Spillers' critique indicates. Like Ruddick, I am afraid to skip ahead to the gender-neutral term parent, because that may efface the radical potential that centuries of mothering—even in, and because of, the violent context of a patriarchal society—bears.

In addition to, and perhaps more importantly than, acknowledging a historical division of labor, using the gendered term allows an important philosophical metaphor for human relationships—birth. Lorde takes this very seriously. In "Poetry is not a Luxury," she asserts, "through poetry we give name to those ideas which are—until the poem—nameless and formless, about to be birthed, but already felt" (36). Even though Lorde uses the verb "to name," I don't think she's thinking of it in the sense of Walter Benjamin ("in the name, the mental being of man communicates itself to God" (65))[30] or of Lacan of naming things into the symbolic order. Instead, I think she's proposing that giving life to a feeling, that like a child inside a womb, is felt and real before its inception into the world, before its naming. For Lorde, there is a plane of existence beneath language and names that is made up of felt experience. She continues, "[t]hat distillation of experience from which true poetry springs

[30] Benjamin's theory of language "presuppose[es] language as an ultimate reality, perceptible only in its manifestation, inexplicable and mystical" (67). The Fall, however, caused "the enslavement of language in prattle" such that "[i]n the language of men, [things] are overnamed" (72,73). The art of translation has to do with reaching towards the "ultimate clarity of the word of God" (74).

births thought as dream births concept, as feeling births idea, as knowledge births (precedes) understanding" (36). The activity of separating the various aspects of felt experience and putting them into words makes poetry possible. Lorde's repetition of births affirms that forming thoughts, concepts and ideas begins inside a person, dreaming mind, and felt experience in the same way that people begin inside women's wombs. By putting these internal processes into language and poetry, they can be shared. The very need for this language, the sharing of different experiences is also made possible by birth—what was once inside, part of and the same, birthing makes separate, outside and different.

Lorde and Ruddick challenge us to see birth as prerequisite, in the sense that we are all born even if we cannot all give birth, and model for human attachment because it stages connection and separation. Like Lorde who moves away from what "the white fathers told us," Ruddick critiques Western philosophy's embarrassed avoidance of birth as a central experience for thinking through human connection (36). Beginning with Aristotle and Plato, Ruddick chastises the tradition of philosophy formed in the male image, "'[t]hrown' into the world, they turn their back on the dependencies that formed them" (192). Philosophy's emphasis on "I" rejects attachment. Instead, like Lorde, Ruddick sees a rich potential in examining birth as the actual and figurative way people are brought into the world. Ruddick argues "[i]t is necessary for feminist philosophers to tell the story of birth again, reconnecting the work of mothering to the female labor in which it begins" (197). For Ruddick reexamining birth as a philosophical metaphor might change the way we think about human interconnection. Ruddick dwells on this in length:

> Regarded in the light of hope rather than suspicion, the entangling of self and other in birth—physical union in metaphysical separateness—is a crystallizing

> symbol not of self-loss but of a kind of self-structuring. The birthing woman is actively herself and her activity is a giving to, a creating of another who could not live without her. Her creation fails unless the infant takes up the singular life, breathing, crying, kicking, sucking her or his own way into the world. Giver and recipient are engaged in a mutual, active, interdependent creation. The particular connectedness of the birthing couple is momentary. A pregnant woman's body begins to hint at a separateness to come; a nursing infant and mother hint at a union past. Only birth itself, singular and unrepeatable, expresses the metaphysical paradox of singularity and bodily conjunction. (210)

The activity of birth encapsulates much of the philosophical angst that humans might experience—we were once physically a part of another and through birth (*el parto*) we become separate, a divide that cannot be undone. We are at once fiercely dependent on other people and completely independent and disconnected from them. This separation is a creative act that eventually requires and allows for language. Because we are no longer physically connected, we must use words and sound to communicate across the separation.

INTERSUBJECTIVITY

Donald Winnicott, a mid-century British pediatrician and psychoanalyst, developed some important models for how people negotiate this separation through his observations of infants' transition from complete dependency on their mother to relative independence. Many psychoanalysts correlate this transition with infants' discovery that they do not have omnipotent control over their mothers. Winnicott noticed that many infants develop an attachment to a "transitional object," a blanket, doll, or teddy bear, that make this discovery

of separation easier (2). Both parents and the infant endow the object with a greater importance than its everyday value, a shared fiction that allows the child to be alone for longer periods of time. Winnicott distinguishes the "potential space" where the "transitional phenomenon" occurs from both "the inner world" of intrapsychic representations of the infant and "actual, or external reality" that we share (54–55). The potential space exists neither in fantasy (mental representations) nor reality (actual world), but somewhere in between. For me, the important point is not the transitional object itself, but the idea that both parents and child are willing to pretend in an effort to live with the reality of their separation. They create a shared fiction to make living in the world both bearable and pleasurable. Winnicott postulated that this "transitional phenomena" develops into "cultural experience" demonstrated through the proclivity of human societies to create and share imaginative art in a wide variety of forms (133). In this sense, his ideas harmonize with Lorde who, as we have seen, understands poetry as a vital means of translating feelings into thoughts that can be shared.

Ettiger, like Lorde, sees the realm of the aesthetic as an important, and ethical, means for people to share experience, especially trauma. Ettiger builds on Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman's understanding of collective trauma, such as the Holocaust, in terms of an "event without witnesses," to propose that the matrixial allows us to be with even if we weren't present. Ettiger writes,

> The matrixial gaze conducts imprints from 'events without witnesses' and passes them on to witnesses who were not there, who I term wit(h)nesses with-out events. The artist in the matrixial dimension is a wit(h)ness with-out event in compassionate wit(h)nessing. The viewer, and this partially includes

> the artist in his or her unconscious viewer position, is the wit(h)ness with-out par excellence. The viewer will embrace traces of the event while transforming them, and will continue to weave metamorphic borderlinks to others, present and archaic, cognized and uncognized, future and past. The viewer is challenged by the artwork to join a specific matrixial borderspace, to join an alliance, an anonymous intimacy. (150-151)

As we have seen, the matrixial makes possible the sharing of trauma, even if that sharing is incomplete and partial. According to Ettiger, people can witness events without witnesses by registering and recognizing the imprints of that trauma. Artists can capture traces of the imprints of this trauma and share them with viewers (while Ettiger focuses on painting, I attempt to extend her argument to writing as well). Embracing the trauma held in an aesthetic object transforms the viewer, activating our awareness of the matrixial borderspace, pushing us toward interconnection.

Contemporary psychoanalysts have built on Winnicott's concept of the "potential space" to theorize "intersubjectivity," the final essential term of "A Child's Call." In her essay "Recognition and Destruction," feminist psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin explains intersubjectivity as a developmentally attained capacity that comes about through the infant's realization that her mother is a separate subject, a recognition that occurs in the "potential space." Benjamin's conception of intersubjectivity supplements Ettiger's "matrixial" in an important way. Unlike the "matrixial," a field of connection always present whether one is aware of it or not, for Benjamin "intersubjectivity," is achieved in fleeting moments of recognition. Benjamin asserts a relationship between intersubjectivity and intrapsychic experience, which she explains as "the psychic internalization and representation of

interactions between self and objects" (28). Benjamin argues that "[a]ll experience is elaborated intrapsychically"; we create mental ideas for what we experience and who we encounter (40). Other subjects break through the mental representations that we have constructed for them creating moments of intersubjective recognition.[31] Benjamin asserts that a tension between the two is central to human experience; "[i]t is the loss of balance between the intrapsychic and the intersubjective, between fantasy and reality, that is the problem" (40). While understanding the outside world requires intrapsychic creativity, those fantasies become dangerous and painful when they preclude recognition of the other as a subject. Importantly, intersubjectivity depends on a difference between subjectivities. This recognition of difference makes possible the recognition of the self. Benjamin asserts "[i]ntersubjective theory postulates that the other must be recognized as another subject in order for the self to fully experience his or her subjectivity in the other's presence" (30). In order to have subjectivity at all, one must have intersubjectivity—there must be two subjects for any sense of self.

In *Tracks* (1988), Erdrich offers a physical paradigm for how we might imagine intersubjective recognition as a model for holding emotional suffering. In Erdrich's art, the

[31] Benjamin uses a toddler as her primary example. The toddler may have an intrapsychic fantasy of omnipotence, that she can control her mother. When the mother fails to conform to her child's vision, the toddler may rail against her mother. Benjamin writes, "in the mental act of negating or obliterating the object, which may be expressed in the real effort to attack the other, we find out whether the real other survives. If she survives without retaliating or withdrawing under attack, then we know her to exist outside ourselves, not just as our mental product" (39). This is an intersubjective encounter.

intersubjective union of mental experiences is embodied and simultaneously dependent on and symbolized by sound. In his penultimate chapter, Nanapush finds four-year-old Lulu, Fleur's child and his adopted grandchild, frozen at his door. Lulu had worn her patent leather shoes to run through the North Dakota snow to get help for her mother. After wrapping her in flannels, Nanapush takes Lulu's icy feet under his arms. Nanapush tells readers and the adult Lulu to whom he narrates, "I hunched over in shock at their ice-hardness. Then I absorbed the cold into myself" (166). Nanapush cradles the child in Erdrich's version of what Winnicott called "holding" referring to the care that manages the physiological and emotional needs of a baby. For Winnicott holding makes possible "the continuity of being" which is necessary to the infant's survival and helps the child to develop an individual self (595). As Nanapush holds Lulu, he looks into her face; he narrates to her older self, "you were suspended, eyes open, looking into mine. Once I had you I did not dare break the string between us and kept on moving my lips, holding you motionless with talking" (167). Nanapush cares for Lulu with the warm touch of his body and the connection between their eyes. The transmission of temperature through physical touch models the intersubjective meeting of minds—even though brains are physically separate we can, to some extent, reflect the mental experience of another through touch, eye contact, and facial expressions.

In Erdrich's prose, intersubjectivity depends on sound. As Lulu regains sensation, she writhes with pain, but Nanapush "know[s] certain cure songs" to ameliorate her suffering (167). Here, Erdrich offers a version of infant psychologist Daniel Stern's concept of "affective attunement," which he defines as "the performance of behaviors that express the quality of feeling of a shared affect state without imitating the exact behavioral expression of the inner state" (142). All of Stern's examples involve pre-verbal music making between

parent and child. The very sound of Nanapush's voice, not the sense of his words, envelops Lulu in an aural embrace that sustains her as much as the heat of his body. Sound transcends the discrete boundaries of bodies, but does not require their violation. Intersubjectivity, as Erdrich paints it, does not imply the elimination of individual selves, but rather depends on those differences. As Nanapush attunes himself to help hold Lulu's agony, he says, "[f]or the first time in my life, it was my duty as well as pleasure to hold forth all night and long into the next morning" (167). Nanapush's penchant for storytelling, paired with the warmth of his body, rescues Lulu from frostbite. Nanapush saves Lulu, making possible her continued existence, and her pain calls him to be his best self.

Erdrich uses both the content of the scene and Nanapush's rhetorical style itself to model intersubjectivity. Nanapush narrates each of his chapters to Lulu, who was once the child he rescued from frostbite. As Carl Gutiérrez-Jones notes, "Nanapush's stories thus have an overt rhetorical setting; he seeks a reuniting of family, and given this goal, his telling is at once an explanation of Fleur's actions and a call for forgiveness" (106). While his songs saved the child, he hopes his words can mend the relationship between Fleur and her now-grown daughter. Each of Nanapush's chapters, told in the style of an oral story, creates an intersubjective field between himself and Lulu; his purpose in encouraging Lulu to forgive her mother both implies resistance on Lulu's part but also a bond with her adopted grandfather. Just as the sound of his voice lulls the child, the rhythm of his storytelling lures readers into the emotional arc of his scenes. When we first learn Nanapush's purpose for narrating, he says,

> I guided the last buffalo hunt. I saw the last bear shot. I trapped the last beaver with a pelt of more than two years' growth. I spoke aloud the words of the

government treaty, and refused to sign the settlement papers that would take away our woods and lake. I axed the last birch that was older than I, and I saved the last Pillager.

Fleur, the one you will not call mother. (Erdrich 2)

Nanapush repeats the pattern of first person, active, declarative statements several times, building momentum with the length and complexity of the sentence. Then he changes pace with a name and a single appositive phrase that stands as its own paragraph shifting both the grammatical rhythm and emotional valence. As readers, we hear Nanapush's words inside our head, taking his position as we bring his story alive with our imagination.[32] At the same time, whenever he uses the second person intended for Lulu, we feel ourselves addressed. The very rhetorical situation of Nanapush's chapters positions us in the intersubjective space between the tribal patriarch and his granddaughter.

Erdrich proposes intersubjective holding as a potential paradigm for bearing seemingly intolerable suffering. Psychoanalyst Robert Stolorow argues similarly that trauma is not only constituted by emotional agony, but also by the absence of another subject, a family member, friend, or analyst, who can provide a "relational home" for that pain (10). Erdrich, in true Pillager fashion, sees Stolorow and raises the stakes. For Erdrich, this sort of care not only requires that the other subject has experienced a previous pain that makes empathy possible, but also that the other subject is different than the one in pain. Nanapush can only absorb Lulu's cold because he is not cold, although he has been before. His words

[32] In *Reading in the Brain; The New Science of How We Read* (2010), Stanislas Dehaene presents evidence that readers do pronounce words in our mind, even if we are not aware of it, to decode written speech.

can only reduce her pain because his songs are different than her cries; Stern makes clear that attunement requires a difference. Second person, Nanapush's chosen voice, also requires two. For Erdrich, feeling another's pain is not enough to ameliorate suffering—we must also maintain our difference as we shape ourselves to hold it.

The exchange between Nanapush and Lulu demonstrates that "intersubjectivity" can be represented between characters even as it is activated by the text's prose. The following chapters seek to bring these theories alive through close analysis of the central texts of "A Child's Call." Like Erdrich, Harper Lee, Toni Morrison, and Nicole Krause not only represent child characters that activate other characters' "matrixial" awareness, but also use a series of strategies to push readers also to become more aware of our interconnection with "Other *unknown non-I(s)*" (87). In some cases, these authors underscore the absence of traditional maternal figures in order to invite readers to join them in imagining "radical mothering." As the artists craft fleeting scenes where characters, in moments of "intersubjective recognition," learn to "mother [them]selves," readers become closer to imagining a world based on interconnection rather than individuation. The final chapter proposes the braided narrative as the key form for intersubjectivity, because the distinct narrative strands invite readers inside the intrapsychic experience of multiple characters while simultaneously requiring some negotiation of the connection and conflict between them.

CHAPTER TWO: "WHERE IS YOUR MOTHER?"

> Mom would have returned by now to start dinner. Women don't realize how much store men set on the regularity of their habits. We absorb their comings and goings into our bodies, their rhythms into our bones. Our pulse is set to theirs, and as always on a weekend afternoon we were waiting for my mother to start us ticking away on the evening.
>
> And so, you see, her absence stopped time.
>
> — Joe Coutts in *The Round House*

Where is your mother? The father's question sets in motion Louise Erdrich's 2012 novel *The Round House*. Joe, the child-narrator, is too young to understand the sexual violence that readers may already suspect his mother has just survived. The just-turned-thirteen-year-old, however, always already understands the important way mothering shapes his life. Even as Joe describes how male bodies absorb feminine "comings and goings" creating a bone-stable rhythm and regular pulse, Erdrich opens the novel with the ominous absence of his particular mother and a suspenseful search that quickly escalates to a (heart-)racing rush to the hospital. Although Joe is thirteen, his sentences recall the earlier relation of mother and infant, when a baby's whole world seems to depend on its mother's "comings and goings," when that presence and absence has not yet settled into an everyday ticking, when the rhythm of her voice and rocking of her body create calm and facilitate sleep. Erdrich's references to felt and biological processes suggest that the social construction of mothering is embedded in and made possible by the attachment between mothers and those for whom they care. Female author and mother Erdrich emphasizes the relationality essential to this claim about maternal care by voicing the observation through her male character

narrator, Joe Coutts. How is mothering implicated in the transformative power of a child's call that this project traces? In what ways does the mother's time-stopping absence both shape the narrative structure of the novel, set its affective tone, and facilitate the kind of attachments that make social change possible?

This scene holds the seeds to preliminary answers to these questions. Joe's adolescent thoughts about his mother's whereabouts stand in the discourse for where she is in the story[33]: Geraldine is either still at ceremonial place that gives the novel its name facing a crazed rapist or already escaping the attempted murder. In the story space of a missing mother, Erdrich situates the social crisis she seeks to ameliorate. This true-to-life act of violence both functions as the novel's central conflict in terms of plot and as the trauma that prevents Geraldine from providing the sort of maternal care Joe needs to deal emotionally with acknowledging the crime. In this first moment of Geraldine's absence, Erdrich also signals one of the rhetorical ways she will draw readers into the story. Bazil asks his son "Where is your mother?" a question Erdrich renders, as she does with dialogue throughout the novel, without quotation marks (3). As this is the first line of dialogue in the book, readers might momentarily or subconsciously, feel addressed by this unquoted second

[33] Structural narratology distinguishes between a narrative's discourse (the 'how' of the telling) and its story (the 'what' of the told). James Phelan uses this sort of language to explain the distinction. In the glossary of *Living to Tell About It*, he defines discourse as "[t]he set of devices for telling a story…. In structuralist narratology, discourse is regarded as the "how" of narrative, distinct from the 'what'—character, event and setting" (215). His glossary offers a complementary definition of story: "[t]he what of narrative…. The events in chronological order constitute the story abstracted from the discourse" (218).

person, even though we know the father speaks to his son. The question simultaneously positions readers in Joe's situation and invites us to think of our own mothers. On the same page, Joe shares the passage I included in the epigraph: "[a]nd so, you see, her absence stopped time" (3). This time, the second person does address the reader. In the space of the page, Erdrich uses a single pronoun to both place us in the position of her narrator and situate us, outside of him, as his audience.

Further, Erdrich's opening overflows with imperfect recursive renderings of care. Erdrich's scenes represent potential care between characters, and like Russian dolls, solicit readers' investment in those scenes. But unlike Russian dolls, identical except for scale, the care Erdrich evokes on these various levels is not perfectly parallel. Even as Bazil asks his son to wonder where his mother is, Erdrich arouses her readers' care for Joe, channeling the potential interest we might feel for any protagonist and the potential responsibility we might feel for any child to this particular character. Bazil and Joe's worry for Geraldine, who we have not yet met, gets matched, albeit in a different register, by our concern for them. Bazil's question strikes me as an inversion of the famous public service announcement "It's ten p.m. Do you know where your children are?" As the characters become anxious about the mother's Sunday afternoon whereabouts we might remember the nightly reminder to worry about our children. Even Joe's sentences themselves echo with a double significance. The face value of Joe's claim that "[w]omen don't realize how much store men set on the regularity of their habits" (3) insists that only men are aware of this importance. If this assertion came through Erdrich's own voice, unadulterated by her character narrator, we might assume it means the opposite of what it states—that men's lives depend on maternal care, and they *ought*, like Joe, to recognize it.

Erdrich is not alone in structuring a novel set on social change around a mother's absence; Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1960) and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) remove and trouble this figure in different ways. Early in *Mockingbird*, Scout cavalierly explains, "[o]ur mother died when I was two, so I never felt her absence…. I did not miss her, but I think Jem did" (6). The film emphasizes Mrs. Finch's absence more than the novel by introducing her death through a bedtime dialogue between Scout and Jem. Although the children talk to each other sleepily, the camera focuses on Gregory Peck sitting on the porch swing outside their window. Atticus's furrowed brow looks reflectively down as he hears his son remind his daughter that they loved his wife.

Figure 2: *To Kill A Mockingbird* 1962: 15:30

Although her death does not cast a big shadow over the plot of the novel, her absence does create a space for Atticus to become the political hero and beloved father. In the film, only a camera pan separates this explanation of the deceased mother from Judge Taylor's request that Atticus take Tom Robinson's case. While Atticus begins this scene overhearing his

children in the intimacy of their room, much of the film gains its power from the children overhearing Atticus in adult conversations or at court. The unobtrusive pan creates a narrative link between the death of the mother and the obligation of the father. In both the novel and the film, the maternal care that Mrs. Finch would have otherwise provided gets divided between Atticus and Calpurnia, a reflection of societal division of labor, which Morrison takes up in *The Bluest Eye* (1970).

In *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison juxtaposes the harsh care Claudia's mother provides with the neglect of Pecola's, whose maternal energies have been outsourced to the white child who she's paid to raise. Morrison bookends novel's story with Claudia's physical illness and Pecola's mental break. Claudia, already assuming the invisibility society thrusts upon her, does not understand the way her mother expresses her care, but does come to associate autumn with "somebody with hands who does not want me to die" (12). Later, Claudia witnesses Pecola's mother turn from her own child whose legs have been burnt by a dropped cobbler to comfort the "pink-and-yellow girl" for whom she's hired to care (109). In the absolute absence of maternal care and after surviving paternal abuse, Pecola creates a sad fantasy where she has the bluest eyes that finally make her feel worthy of love.

In this chapter, I discuss the ways *The Round House*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *The Bluest Eye* lay groundwork for social change by creating a productive tension in the narrative space of a missing mother. While the novels neither represent directly nor enact radical maternal relationships, they do open a possibility for a sort of maternal care that leads towards social transformation. I argue that by foregrounding the absent or absented mother, Erdrich, Lee, and Morrison engage traditional understandings and expectations of maternal care in order to activate what Alexis Pauline Gumbs calls "the radical potential" of

mothering. Imagery of attachment and maternal attention function as proscenium walls framing the social issues that the novels stage. All three writers link a readerly attachment to their child-narrator with an investment in social change. In order to make this argument, I propose a theory for how we might account for the way writers evoke particular emotions in novels. Authors can create a series of similarly structured (what happens: character, timing events, etc.) and styled (how they are written: the pace, the dialogue, the prose, etc.) facilitate a certain response in readers. As these scenes recur over the course of the novel, authors can slowly shape readers' feelings. After clarifying what I mean by mothering, I begin with *The Round House* because Erdrich's novel demonstrates this formal shaping of feeling most clearly. Over the first thirty pages of *The Round House*, Erdrich crafts three different scenes where questions of what happened to Joe's mother come up between him and an adult figure, and she uses the responses of the adults to position readers in a particular stance towards Joe that she models through Cappy in the fourth chapter. While Erdrich foregrounds potential maternal care, Lee abandons explicit discussions of the mother and, instead, frames important scenes with imagery of attachment to rewrite the racist social script. In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Lee restages the mad-dog scene both at the jailhouse and in the courtroom to help Scout and readers see how we should feel about Atticus's bravery in the face of rabies and racism. I conclude with *The Bluest Eye* because the pattern Morrison creates to facilitate readers' feelings is the most complicated—she repeats similar scenes of increasingly failed maternal care using different narrative styles, forging the genre of the braided narrative. In each of that novel's four seasons, Morrison begins with Claudia MacTeer's naive narration that touches on her mother and then switches to omniscient explanations of Pecola's life, juxtaposing Claudia's care with Pecola, and other characters', abuse and neglect.

Although I begin with literary representations of mothers who birthed their children, my understanding of the term is not biologically determined (although as we'll see the biology does afford us some important insights). Instead, like Alexis Pauline Gumbs, I see "the word 'mother' less as a gendered identity and more as a possible action, a technology of transformation" (23). As we saw in the previous chapter, Gumbs explains radical mothering as

> an investment in the future that requires a person to change the status quo of their own lives, of their community and of the society as a whole again and again and again in the practice of affirming growing, unpredictable people who deserve a world that is better than what we can even imagine. (115)

In Gumbs' analysis "mothering" requires self-transformation, social change, and openness to the wild possibility of the "unpredictable person" that is the child. *Revolutionary Mothering*'s definition and celebration of mothering is radical in the context of strategic, persistent efforts by the U.S. government to deny motherhood to non-white women by separating mothers from their children (under slavery[34] and its legacies and Indian Boarding

[34] As Gumbs reminds us, the United States was founded on an institution of slavery that "has so fundamentally ripped the work of mothering from the bodies of Black mothers, forcing them to do the labor of mothering for white and Black children while fully denying them any of the authority of motherhood by killing and selling away and raping and mutilating their biological children and their chosen kin" (120).

Schools[35]) or sterilizing potential mothers.[36] Current laws that allow the deportation of mothers of citizen children[37] and policies that hinder LGBTQ families from adopting continue this practice. The violence against women staged in *The Round House* and the exploitation of Black women's labor illustrated in *The Bluest Eye* also attest to this trend of preventing women of color from mothering. When Kimberlé Crenshaw defines "intersectionality," the way systems of domination, such as racism and patriarchy, and even organized efforts to resist them, can overlap in damaging ways for those in both categories, she refers to similar policies that trap women of color in abusive situations. In this socio-historical context, mothering is a radical sort of care that demands social transformation.

I follow the editors of *Revolutionary Mothering* in distinguishing between "motherHOOD," the stagnant social category and "motherING," the potential transformative activity. Building on Hortense Spillers,[38] Gumbs explains "motherHOOD is a status granted

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[35] Psychologist Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart explains how Indian Boarding Schools not only emotionally and physically damaged children but also left them "ill-prepared for raising their own children in a traditional American Indian context" (64).

[36] In *Revolutionary Mothering*, Esteli Juarez explains "hundreds of thousands of Native and Puerto Rican women were sterilized, many of them without knowledge or consent or with the belief that the process was reversible" (161).

[37] While Trump's separation policies do this overtly, Obama's workplace raids had a similar effect.

[38] In "Mama's Baby Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" (1987), Spillers interrogates the way African-American families have been named into the symbolic order and social discourse of the United States. She concludes "This different cultural text actually

by patriarchy to white middle-class women, those women whose rights to their children are never questioned, regardless of who does the labor (the how) of keeping them alive" (22). "MotherHOOD" is not a far leap from "the cult of true womanhood" that played an important role in racial construction in the tradition of lynching.[39] Even more broadly, "motherHOOD" reflects the category of "personhood," which has also been used Western societies to distinguish between those who have rights and those who do not or cannot because they are not full persons under the law. In contrast to these exclusive identity categories, "MotherING is … a possible action, the name for that nurturing work, that survival dance, worked by enslaved women who were forced to breastfeed the children of the status mothers while having no control over whether their birth or chosen children were sold away" (Gumbs 22). The behavior of mothering, as Gumbs points out, might not have much overlap with the social status of "motherHOOD," but instead is often practiced even when society strives to prevent one from being a mother.

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reconfigures, in historically ordained discourse, certain representational potentialities for African-Americans: 1) motherhood as female blood-rite is outraged, is denied, at the very same time that it becomes the founding term of a human and social enactment; 2) a dual fatherhood is set in motion, comprised of the African father's banished name and body and the captor father's mocking presence. In this play of paradox, only the female stands in the flesh, both mother and mother-dispossessed. This problematizing of gender places her, in my view, out of the traditional symbolics of female gender, and it is our task to make a place for this different social subject. In doing so, we are less interested in joining the ranks of gendered femaleness than gaining the insurgent ground as female social subject" (80).

[39] Barbara Welter explained this 19th century concept in an article in the *American Quarterly*.

My emphasis on mothering seeks to highlight the force of attachment as an affective field that functions underneath and parallel to the symbolic order associated with the father and the law. As Lacan writes "[i]t is in the name of the father that we must recognize the basis of the symbolic function which, since the dawn of historical time, has identified his person with the figure of the law" (66). If we begin, as Audre Lorde does, on the level of emotion and recognize with her that birthing precedes defining, then we might be able to see the affective forces at play in the understanding of mothering as distinct from, but not mutually exclusive to, fathering. Atticus Finch is an excellent figure to work through this distinction because, as many have pointed out, he functions in *Mockingbird* as both law and father, representing the social order even as he seeks to shift the norms.[40] While we recognize his great courtroom speeches and moral imperatives that unite his roles as legal and patriarchal hero, we might also remember the frequent scenes where Scout takes comfort in Atticus's lap. This sort of physical care resonates in a different register than the paternal leadership. Scout and her father's embrace models a central position of attachment in primates and humans. British psychologist and psychoanalyst John Bowlby first proposed attachment as a theory of motivation (distinct from Freud's theory of drives) in the middle of the twentieth century. He writes,

> In most species, there is more than one kind of behavior shown by young that results in young and mother staying close to one another. For example, a young's vocal calls attract mother to it, and its locomotory movements take it

[40] For more on Atticus and the law of the father see Austin Sarat and Umphrey Martha Merrill's "TEMPORAL HORIZONS: On the Possibilities of Law and Fatherhood in To Kill a Mockingbird."

> to her. Since both kinds of behavior, and others as well, have the same consequence, namely proximity, it is useful to have a general term to cover them all; and for this purpose 'attachment behavior' is used. (182)

Bowlby points out that the primary goal of attachment behavior is proximity—physical and emotional comfort—not food. Much of *Mockingbird* involves Scout and Jem demonstrating basic attachment behavior—they track Atticus's movements. Scout and Jem greet their father at the end of the road when he comes home to work; they follow him when he leaves the house at odd hours, and they observe him in court. Although Bowlby consistently uses the term "mother," he makes it clear that one's primary attachment figure can be anyone who reciprocates with caregiving behavior and does not have to be the infant's birth mother.

Neuroscience has shown that our very brain structures facilitate and encourage this sort of attachment. Children seek their attachment figures because they enjoy "proximity to him or her and may want to be held or cuddled" (Bowlby 307). Although Scout values her father's legal leadership, she also appreciates the physical and emotional comfort he provides. Young of many different species have behavioral systems that encourage them to attach to a figure that might care for them, which has clear survival benefits. Neuroscientist Jaak Panksepp has found that most animals have brain structures that facilitate this type of attachment behavior. Separating most mammal and bird babies from their mothers activates what Panksepp calls the PANIC/GREIF system and results in crying, the lighting up of certain brain regions, and the increased release of uncomfortable chemicals such as cortisol. These adverse effects can elicit a CARE response in others, which can calm the activity of the PANIC system. Comforting touch, even across species, among other things, can elicit secretion of opiods and oxytocin, happy brain chemicals, Panksepp associates with CARE.

It's not just that *Mockingbird* illustrates basic attachment—many novels seeking to portray realistic relationships between children and their parents must evoke similar imagery—but more important, Lee uses attachment behavior to set up and frame the scenes that deal with Tom Robinson's case, explicitly connecting this sort of care with the social issue the novel addresses. Scout, Jem, and Dill find themselves outside of the county jail, poised to stop the lynch mob, because they followed Atticus there. When the three children first see Atticus underneath his light at the jail, Jem explains that Scout shouldn't run to him, "he might not like it. He's alright, let's go home. I just wanted to see where he was" (171). Just like the primates and humans Bowlby writes about, the young Finches follow their father, but unlike Bowlby's hypothesis that young animals attach out of an instinct for protection, these children want to protect their father, and in so doing protect themselves, highlighting the recursive nature of the potential care activated in these novels. When Jem senses the danger of the mob, he refuses to leave his father's side. Likewise, in the film version, both Scout and Jem go with Atticus to Helen Robinson's house. This not only allows Jem to have the face-to-face exchange with another boy of about his age, but it is also the second time we see the story's villain: Mr. Ewell. When Atticus gets back in the car, Jem puts his hand on his father's shoulder again reversing the protective care usually associated with attachment. In the film, we witness Jem accompany his father to Helen Robinson's house to tell her that her husband has been shot by police. In the novel, Jem also gets to go, but we hear it third hand, as told to Scout by Dill. Both the visual of Jem in the front seat watching his father and Scout's narrative account of the event keep the audience in the position of the child as Atticus deals with the adult issue of murder. Because the children care about their father, and not initially Tom or Helen Robinson, Lee can raise important

political issues without being sentimental. Finally, the friends witness the famous trial because they want to keep an eye on what their father is up to. Such important scenes of the novel are not only filtered through the narrative voice of a child, but also framed by that child's relationship to her father—not as the law but as her primary attachment figure.

While Lee neither represents nor enacts the sort of radical mothering contemporary feminists outline, reading her scenes in light of those theories allows us to see how her narrative structure and style, coupled with this consistent attachment imagery, creates a productive tension between the affective force of maternal care and the paternal power of the law. The moral lessons of *Mockingbird* are made possible by a felt physiological connection between father and child. In the film, when Atticus shares his classic line about walking in someone else's shoes with Scout, Robert Mulligan positions them side by side on the porch swing. Importantly, this is not a close-up, but a medium shot; this tunes viewers into the interpersonal interactions of the characters and the emotions behind them. At the same time, the medium distance keeps the background in view; Atticus and his daughter are outside of the house, looking out on society, which underscores the social topic of their conversation. They are not inside, in the domestic sphere.

Figure 2: ***To Kill A Mockingbird*** **1962: 40:00**

While this shot might triangulate viewers into the position of the missing mother (whose absence we learned about on that very swing), it also invites us to see the faces of both father and daughter. Just as the medium distance of the shot allows viewers to consider the relationship between the two characters and the context, Atticus's comforting embrace allows Scout to ponder his words without dealing with the weight of his gaze. This is reciprocal—the fact that Scout looks away from him gives him time to find the appropriate response.

The face is central to both Bowlby's theories of attachment and cognitive psychologic theories of empathy. Bowlby explains how certain embraces facilitate this facial engagement:

> Not only are babies biased to behave in special ways towards humans but mother also are biased to behave in special ways towards babies. By bringing her baby into a face-to-face orientation to herself a mother gives him opportunity to look at her. (272)

Cognitive scientist Jonathan Cole argues, "empathy itself is supported by, and requires, the embodied expression and communication of emotion that the face provides" (271). The looking that holding babies facilitates trains them to read emotions written on the faces of others. In the novel, Scout often sits in Atticus's lap and lets us know, in important scenes, when she's looking someone in the face. Lee underscores empathy in both the content and imagery of her scenes. That viewers can see Atticus and Scout's faces while we cannot imbricates the readers in the empathic work. We hold both their faces, both their emotions, in our mind while we watch them, just as we imagine the facing scenes in the literature. As George Butte explains in *Suture and Narrative: Deep Intersubjectivity in Fiction and Film* (2016), the facing scene would have to be captured in profile or through a suture shot which involves the back of the shoulder or the back of the head.

In addition to framing many central scenes with imagery of attachment, Lee emphasizes the relationality central to Atticus's ethical decision-making process. In the novel, Atticus's decision to defend Tom Robinson because of his attachment to and relationship with his children takes "the different voice" Gilligan attributes to women. Like the women and girls Gilligan interviewed Atticus frames his decision in terms of his relationship to others in addition to his adherence to his moral principles. In fact, Atticus asserts the motivating force of his children above and beyond the Christian teachings. When his brother cites the bible "Let this cup pass from you, eh?", Atticus does not respond with Jesus's words "not as I will, but as thou wilt" (100, Mathew 26:39). Instead, he asks the rhetorical question: "[d]o you think I could face my children otherwise?" (100). Atticus does couch his reasoning in the law of the father where authority stems from moral judgment; as he earlier explains to Scout, if he didn't take the case "I couldn't even tell you or Jem not to

do something again" (86). The way Lee structures these scenes, however, emphasizes the relational aspect of Atticus's decision. He not only explains that he made his choice *for* his children, but also makes sure Scout knows that he did so for them. In addition to telling Scout directly, he makes sure she overhears his conversation with his brother. At the end of that chapter, Scout writes "it was not until many years later that I realized he wanted me to hear every word he said" (101). This scene, like Erdrich's opening above, offers a recursive rendering of care. Atticus vocalizes his concern for his children while Scout demonstrates her investment in him by eavesdropping and her final recognition that he intended her to hear echoes and deepens the original care. If mothering is about transforming oneself and the world for one's children, then Atticus's actions as Lee depicts them here resonate as maternal care. The way Lee frames the scene as a performance staged to facilitate Scout's moral development further emphasizes the relational aspect of Atticus's choice. In the absence of Mrs. Finch, Lee can let Atticus serve both as paternal authority and maternal attachment figure.

THE ROUND HOUSE

> "As a Cheyenne proverb goes, a nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women are on the ground"
>
> — Louise Erdrich in *The New York Times*

Either before the novel opens, or off-page during the first scene, the narrator's mother Geraldine survives an unspeakable crime. Unspeakable in the double sense of trauma theory where certain aggressions violate "the human cognitive capacity to perceive and to assimilate," but at the same time must be spoken and heard (Dori Laub 85). Unspeakable in the legal sense because, as Erdrich explains in detail, the U.S. justice system denies

Geraldine a trial where she can testify against her attacker, a fictive testament to an actual legal failure. And unspeakable in the narrative sense because thirteen-year-old Joe does not understand and therefore cannot narrate the violence. Geraldine herself refuses to speak until half way through the novel because her attacker threatened the life of another mother and her baby if Geraldine "say[s] one word even one word up in heaven after you are dead" (162). After ascertaining the safety of the child, Geraldine gives a powerful testimony, precisely in the center of the novel that confirms much of what Joe has already figured out. Erdrich's decision to disclose the violence this way makes some important shifts in how we think about witnessing trauma. Traditional understandings of trauma conceptualize it as a painful event that occurs before one's consciousness can conceptualize or prepare for it. Cathy Caruth, in the Freudian tradition, explains trauma as an event that "is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions" (4). Although this is certainly true for Geraldine's experience of the event, it is not true for the reader's experience of reading about it. While Geraldine could have been prepared (and should not have to be), Erdrich organizes the first half of the novel into a series of gradual realizations about what happened. So, when Geraldine eventually does narrate the crime, the reader and Joe have already determined what the series of events must have been. In this way, Erdrich makes the trauma Geraldine's alone, and not Joe's or the readers. This affirms certain vicissitudes about human experience: we cannot feel another's pain; certain bodies are more vulnerable to sexual violence than others. Even if he were more mature, Joe cannot fully understand what it's like for women to face sexual violence and non-Native readers cannot fully know what it's like to face the prejudice and hatred Joe explains to us.

In her slow disclosure of the violence Geraldine survived, Erdrich positions the reader as a flexible third in careful relation to Joe and his interlocutors. Over the course of the first few chapters, Joe pieces together what has happened to his mother through a series of conversations with adult figures who give him the words necessary to name what has happened, even if he cannot understand it. In the first chapter Joe reflects, "[v]iolently raped, I thought. I knew those words fit together. Probably from some court case I'd read in my father's books or from a newspaper article or the cherished paperback thrillers my uncle, Whitey, kept on his handmade bookshelf" (15). As Joe fits these words together in his mind, readers use Erdrich's words to fit together the crime her novel addresses. Even as we experience the novel through the eyes of our young narrator, we also stand apart from him because we have a more mature understanding of what those words mean. In addition to the concern readers might feel for the survivor of sexual violence, Erdrich adds worry for the child who has to learn not only that such things are possible in this world, but they have happened to his mother. While Erdrich invites readers to identify with Joe, she also invites us to stand as adults outside of him by crafting a series of scenes with adult characters who have the potential to care for Joe.

Joe comes to an understanding of what his mother survived through a series of stylistically and structurally similar dialogues where other characters serve as what Philip Fisher calls "registers." Fisher explains that, in some cases where writers want readers to feel a specific emotion, "an author often sets between us and a report a figure we can call the 'register,' whose response models our response" (145). Fisher proposes as his key example Rousseau's discussion of a man watch an animal eat a baby outside his prison cell as the child's mother cries helplessly. In this stereotypical, contrived example the incarcerated man

serves as what Fisher calls the "register" because "he registers for us the 'correct' response" (145). In each of these scenes, Joe learns something important about what has happened to his mother through a conversation with an adult, who has the potential to offer maternal care. The word "rape" enters the novel's discourse on the breath of a pregnant woman who Joe sits across from in the hospital waiting room; through a poignant conversation with his Aunt Clemence, Joe learns that his mother won't die but that the fact that his mother smelled like gas is ethically significant; and, his father explains that the attacker dropped matches because he was trying to use them. Erdrich renders these dialogues as what Gerard Genette calls "scene" when the timing of the telling matches the timing of the told; Genette explains "needless to say pure dialogue cannot be slowed down" (95). But dialogue isn't always a rapid back and forth. Instead, there can also be pauses, significant movements, knowing glances. In these scenes, Erdrich completes this mimesis by filling the space of the conversations' pause with descriptions of the characters' actions and Joe's thoughts. Through his diligent reporting of these scenes, Joe discloses important information about the crime, but as a "two weeks ago, I'd been twelve" teenager, Joe cannot fully interpret what these clues mean (3).[41] Through these scenes, mature readers, who understand what Joe cannot, get a sense of how Erdrich wants us to feel about this knowledge.

[41] James Phelan explains "narrators perform three main roles—reporting, interpreting, and evaluating" and asserts that narrators can fail or underperform on each of these three axes (50). Phelan expands "unreliable reporting occurs along the axis of characters, facts and events; unreliable reading (or interpreting) occurs along the axis of knowledge and perception; and unreliable regarding (or evaluating) occurs along the axis of ethics and evaluation" (50). For Phelan, narrators can either fail on a given axis and thus misreport,

Although Joe's first "register" models for readers how *not* to respond, the scene establishes a structural and stylistic pattern that the others will follow. Erdrich stages an adult figure across from Joe in the hospital's waiting room and signals the potential for maternal care by casting a woman at the cusp of biological motherhood. But, as in Gumbs's conception of it, mothering is more than the physical capacity to produce a child. In Joe's initial conversation with the pregnant woman we can see how Erdrich structures these scenes:

> A skinny pregnant woman…. Slumped down next to a quiet old woman, across from me, and picked up an old *People* magazine.
>
> Don't you Indians have your own hospital over there? Aren't you building a new one?
>
> The emergency room's under construction, I told her.
>
> Still, she said.
>
> Still what? I made my voice grating and sarcastic. I was never like so many Indian boys, who'd look down quiet in their anger and say nothing. My mother taught me different. (8)

Erdrich frames this dialogue with a simple description of the other people in the waiting room and Joe's thoughts about how one should feel about her demeaning attitude. These lines of prose do not break pace with the scene, but instead hold the space of the natural pauses in conversation. This gives the reader time to join Joe in his indignation about her racism and understand her final remark about the rape as a mean jab at Joe. Although this

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misread, or misregard or they can fall short on the axis and underreport, underread, or underinterpret.

woman does help Joe begin to understand what happened, it's clear that she does so out of a sense of hatred. In this scene, Erdrich aligns our reaction entirely with Joe's: we should feel angry with this woman. The pregnant woman is the first white character in the novel, and Erdrich makes it clear that her readers, many of whom are also white, should not respond like she does.

While the racist pregnant woman serves as a register for what not to do, Joe's Aunt Clemence functions as a more positive model pushing readers toward a particular feeling. Again, Erdrich casts an-almost-mother as Joe's interlocutor; a few pages before this dialogue, Erdrich explains that Clemence, Joe's maternal aunt, has much in common with his mother. Joe describes them both as "[c]alm and direct, with take-charge eyes and movie-star lips" (10). In contrast with the almost paradoxically "skinny pregnant woman," the maternal figures of Clemence and Geraldine are not only "beautiful," "slim even after their children," but strong powerful women whose very features can command a room (10). In Joe's conversation with his aunt, where Joe first uses the word "rape" to name the crime, he asks his aunt a series of questions rendered in the same unquoted dialogue as the previous scene. Just as Bazil's opening question "where is your mother?" half-addresses the reader, so too do Joe's poignant questions of his aunt query the reader as well: "Was it rape?" "Will she die from it?" and "Why did she smell like gas?" (14-15) Unlike the child-narrator, we already know the answer to the first, and if we didn't suspect the answer to the third already, Clemence's response, confirms our suspicions. This scene is important to the plot of the novel because it discloses to readers that, after raping Geraldine, the attacker attempted to immolate her. This understanding, although still unclear to Joe, should make readers feel as sick as he describes his aunt feeling. Joe explains that, unable to answer his final question,

"Clemence stared at me, the Kleenex frozen beside her nose, and her skin went the color of old snow. She bent over suddenly and put her head down on her knees" (15). Like the previous scene, these sentences of prose stand for a tense pause in the dialogue, maintaining the pace of the scene. Clemence models a much more appropriate emotional response than the pregnant woman. Even though Joe still cannot fully interpret the meaning of the smell, he knows, from Clemence's reaction, that it is ethically and emotionally significant. He concludes the scene: "I didn't ask her about the gasoline again" (15). While the pregnant lady functions as a failed register, Clemence serves as a more perfect, but still flawed, model. Even as readers can acknowledge the horror at having to explain the hatred that underlies immolation to a child, we might also hope for someone who can comfort Joe more completely.

Joe's confusion about gasoline comes up a third time in a conversation between him and his father in a scene stylistically and structurally similar to the previous two. It communicates important information about the crime to Joe and the reader even as it emphasizes the emotional pain associated with the attack. Again, Erdrich positions an almost-mother, this time Joe's father Like Clemence, Bazil hesitates to answer Joe in a way that reveals the rapist's murderous intent, but unlike his sister-in-law, he does respond to his son:

> Why'd he drop the matches?
>
> My father rubbed a hand across his eyes and again had trouble speaking.
>
> He wanted to, tried to, he was having trouble lighting a match.
>
> A book match?
>
> Yes.

Oh. Did he get it lit?

No… the match was wet.

So then what happened?

Suddenly my eyes began to water and I bent over my plate. (27-28)

Like the scene with Clemence, the lines of prose stand in the place of the conversation's pause. Just as his aunt's physical reaction to Joe's question alerts him to it's ethical significance, his father's covered eyes and faltered speech helps Joe see the severity of the events. While Clemence cannot respond at all, Joe's father gives minimal answers that confirm for the reader what Joe still cannot narrate. Although Joe still cannot bring himself to say it, readers can already imagine the response to his final unanswered question. In this scene, Joe's physical reaction echoes Clemence's in the hospital. While she bent over her knees in an attempt not to faint, Joe leans over his plate to keep from weeping. Just as in the previous scene, Erdrich arouses our sympathies for both the adult and the child. As much as we feel for the father and aunt who struggle with whether or not and how to explain such violence to a child, we also feel for Joe who must come to realize what has happened to his mother. By setting these registers before us, Erdrich simultaneously affirms the horror of the crime and creates an appetite for a type of mothering. The maternal care that Erdrich invites resonates with Gumbs's definition of mothering as an activity that affirms children and creates a better world. In addition to encouraging an empathy with Clemence and Bazil's struggle to explain (or not) to Joe the violent realities of the current world, Erdrich creates a desire for a sort of care that assures Joe of something better, some way to cope with such hatred. Although kind and attentive, neither Clemence nor Bazil embrace Joe—they cannot explain to him what has happened and comfort him with either physical affirmation or the lie

that everything will be okay. This communicates the way violence radiates throughout a family and can foster a desire that someone will comfort Joe in ways his relatives cannot.

The concluding scene in the series comes after Joe finally acknowledges attempted immolation to himself. Although readers may have determined the horrible extent of the rapist's intent in any of the previous scenes, Joe does not admit it to himself until the fourth chapter when he goes to the round house and retraces his mother's—and the rapist's—steps to find the gas can in the lake. Erdrich reminds us of the previous scenes when Joe explains his cognitive resistance to imagining what happened to his mother: "I had now come to the understanding that my mother's attacker had also tried to set her on fire. Although this fact had been made plain, or was at least implicit in Clemence's reaction at the hospital and my father's account of my mother's escape, my understanding had resisted" (62). Alone at the round house, Joe convulses and vomits enacting the physical repulsion implied in his aunt's reaction and his own involuntary tears during the conversation with his father. Joe has discovered on his own what his relatives could not bring themselves to explain to him.

Now that Joe has full understanding of what his mother survived, Erdrich constructs a final scene where Cappy, his best friend, cares for him in a way the parental figures cannot—the teenage boys model a version of "mothering ourselves." After a little more sleuth work with his friends, Joe calls his father to let him know where he is. The ensuing scene mirrors the first three stylistically—the pace of narration matches the pace of a conversation, and Joe fills the pauses in dialogue with descriptions of the characters' actions. But there is a major structural difference. Erdrich locates the adult figure in another physical space at the end of a phone line and places Cappy, Joe's best friend behind him. Unlike the previous scenes, the question of gasoline does not come up, but instead sets the tone for the scene as Joe begins

the chapter by answering it for himself. In place of that plot related question, Joe asks for the affirmation and care Erdrich already created a desire for in the previous scenes. At the end of their brief conversation, Joe's "I love you, Dad" echoes into silence as a plea for connection that Joe wasn't aware he wanted (71). His father unknowingly places the receiver back in the cradle, a twentieth-century telephone word that Erdrich pulls from the past to emphasize his unintentional failure to hold his teenage child. Bazil could not comfort his son in the first scene, when Joe explicitly asks about the matches and doesn't know he needs to in this one. Through this series of scenes, Erdrich makes her readers witness these adults' inability to help Joe countenance this awful knowledge, and the repetition of that understandable lack of comfort raises a desire for some sort of care.

Erdrich satisfies the reader's desire that Joe's suffering be acknowledged and cared for through the figure of Joe's friend Cappy who Joe finds standing behind him after his phone call. In the same mimetic pace, Joe narrates how he lashes out at Cappy, which alerts his best friend to what he probably already knew—Joe's deep distress. Rather than leaving Joe alone with his grief and anger, Cappy waits, creating an opening for Joe. Like the previous scenes, Erdrich uses descriptive prose to hold the time, and tension of the scene's pause, but this time rather than narrating the characters' actions she traces Joe's thoughts:

> He turned around. I put my hands in my pocket and scuffed my shoes on the floor. My dad had refused on principle to buy me the type of basketball shoes I had wanted in Fargo. He said I didn't need new shoes, which was true. Cappy had the shoes I wanted. He had his hands in his pockets too, and he was looking at the floor, ducking his head back and forth. (71)

Cappy turns from Joe's aggression, but does not leave his friend. Instead, he mirrors Joe's typical teenage posture with his own ducked head and scuffing feet. Both boys lower their eyes, a gesture of shame—Joe for cursing at his friend and Cappy for witnessing Joe's vulnerability. Importantly, Cappy does not abandon Joe; he does not fold his arms in that other, less open standard teenage stance. Instead, unlike Bazil and Clemence who do not indicate whether they know what Joe is thinking or feeling, Cappy reads his friend's internal and tangential thoughts as clearly as we read Erdrich's unquoted dialogue. Somehow Cappy knows that Joe's mind had wandered to basketball shoes, one of the few fashion items society allows teenage boys to covet, but Erdrich's choice of object is not just mimetic. Walking in other peoples' shoes, or skin as Atticus puts it to Scout, is a figure of empathy, but, as always with Erdrich, she twists the worn metaphor. Joe narrates: "[s]trangely, he said what I had been thinking, though he lied. / You got the shoes I wanted" (72). Cappy does not claim to feel Joe's pain or understand his agony, but his gesture acknowledges Joe's suffering. Cappy's physical pain, "he walked away from me on pinched feet" convinces Joe that Cappy saw his emotional pain, "he had heard what I'd said on the phone" (72). Cappy walks in his friend's shoes, not to claim that he knows what Joe suffers, but to communicate that he sees it. Unlike Clemence or Joe's father, who are themselves too hurt to fully acknowledge Joe's agony Cappy can be the friend who helps hold Joe's pain. Cappy enacts a type of "mothering ourselves" because he faces Joe in his vulnerability and acknowledges his pain.

Erdrich uses a series of stylistically and structurally similar scenes to shape the reader's response to Joe. She models the wrong reaction in the form of a racist pregnant woman. She illustrates how those closest to Geraldine—her sister and her spouse—cannot

bring themselves to help Joe make sense of the violence let alone comfort him through it. Then she interposes a friend who can give Joe the attention that his relatives cannot. While Clemence and Bazil can think, but not say what happened to Geraldine, Cappy, who might or might not know what the adults do, finds a way to tell Joe he's thinking of him and feeling for him. Even as Erdrich positions us close to Clemence and Bazil insofar as we know the answers to the questions they cannot fully bring themselves to respond to, she positions Cappy close to us. Like the readers, Cappy witnesses Joe in some of his most vulnerable moments. Cappy seems to be able to, like the readers, read Joe's thoughts. Cappy can give Joe the sort of care that readers may have wanted to fill in during the previous scenes. He affirms Joe in the way Lorde describes in the context of Black women "we have come to expect only from our mothers" (173). In this way, Erdrich positions readers as potential friends for Joe in the image of Cappy who practices the radical peer care, a sort of mothering ourselves. This is why Cappy's death is so devastating. Throughout the novel, he cared for Joe, helped plot and execute the murder, and, as he says to Joe, "I always had your back" (291). He stood behind Joe every morning to follow through on Joe's attempt to murder the rapist just as he stood behind Joe in his conversation with his father. Joe and Cappy do succeed in avenging the rape, but Erdrich kills Cappy in a car accident. This conclusion both resolves the novel's central conflict and creates a sense of despair. Cappy's death not only leaves Joe feeling alone and isolated, but it also leaves the reader, whose sympathy was shaped in his image, wanting to fill that void. It gives us the exigency, as we will see in the following chapters, to translate the attachment to fiction to real world advocacy.

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

> Atticus was only a man. It takes a woman to do that kind of work.

—Scout in *To Kill a Mockingbird*

To Kill A Mockingbird makes important, calculated, shifts in the cultural narrative that underpinned the tradition of lynching; it cracks the white supremacist solidarity upon which lynch law depended. Harper Lee not only created an aspirational figure for hopeful white liberals to attach to, but she relegated the evils of racism to white "trash." As Colin D. Pearce writes, "*To Kill a Mockingbird* is the literary face that the South has turned toward the world since 1960" (268). This is an important feat given that the alternative might have been framed by the original rhetoric of George Wallace. Although Lee's amendments to the cultural narrative leave racial hierarchies intact and emphasize class divisions, she does foster a desire and create an imaginary role for someone to simultaneously be white and want equality before the law. For me, *Mockingbird* is meaningful not only because of the shift it made in this cultural narrative, but because of *how* the novel made it. Even though Lee relies on class lines to shift the racist script, as I will discuss in "The Ethics of Killing Birds," she crafts a particular kind of narrator, a child whose innocence in the hands of a sophisticated writer can make a nation pause and reconsider the way we think. Through *Mockingbird*, Lee capitalizes on the human proclivity for attachment to invite readers to join a new ethical code where what it means to be a gentleman or a lady involves working toward equality before the law not exercising vigilante violence.

This reveals the darker reason for the absent Mrs. Finch: the figure of the white woman is the cornerstone of a Southern code of chivalry that includes lynch law. In 1892, anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells explained that this extralegal murder of Black men (and sometimes women and children) is premised on "the old threadbare lie that Negro men rape white women" (*Southern Horrors*). As Wells documents, in many southern communities

mobs of white men would accuse Black men of raping white women with little or no evidence, hold an impromptu and unfair trial, and then torture and murder the accused. This ritualized violence emerged after the civil war as a violent strategy to maintain racial hierarchy after the abolition of slavery. Lynching spread in the post-bellum South because, as Wells explains, white mobs did not fear "the loss of several hundred dollars" that the murder of a slave would cost (75). While the number of lynchings reached another high in the years following the First World War, the instances of this vigilante terror had begun to decline by 1930s when *To Kill A Mockingbird* was set. The 1930s, however, also witnessed the publication and rapid transition to Technicolor of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*, which simultaneously celebrated the Klan, the cult organized around lynching, and reimagined racism in a new South. The threadbare lie of white women's virtue continues to play a major role in shaping the narrative around lynching. While Lee never uses the word "lynch," she does use the euphemism of "Southern womanhood." In the novel, Scout overhears Atticus arguing with Aunt Alexandra, saying he's "in favor of Southern womanhood as much as anybody, but not for preserving polite fiction at the expense of human life" (167). By removing Mrs. Finch from the picture years before the novel begins, Lee can relegate this debate to an overheard conversation rather than staging it in the novel. Lee dismisses Mayella, the white woman who cries rape, by relegating her to "white trash" as we'll see in the fourth chapter. Situating the death of Mrs. Finch off-stage and in the past, Lee foregrounds the presence of Tom Robinson and his innocence. Instead of defending his white woman's virtue, Atticus displays his heroism by defending that of the innocent Black man. As mentioned above, in the film version of *To Kill A Mockingbird*, the scene that acknowledges Mrs. Finch's death transitions immediately into Atticus taking Tom

Robinson's case almost as if the missing mother creates a space for Atticus's moral leadership.

The absence of Mrs. Finch allows Lee to capitalize on one of the more conservative aspects of maternal care, the activity Ruddick calls training. Ruddick explains that mothers are usually responsible for training their children to behave in a socially acceptable way. Many of the Maycomb community believe that Atticus's loss accounts for his children's (mis)behavior. Mrs. Dubose, for instance, attributes Scout and Jem's tendency to "run wild" to the fact Atticus never remarried and goes so far to assert that "if our mother were living we would not have come to such a state" of "moral degeneration," which, for Mrs. Dubose, includes Atticus's defense of Tom Robinson (117, 135). Lee reminds her readers that in the South women were, to a large degree, responsible for training children in a set of ethics built upon racial and class divisions. As Atticus gets deeper into Tom Robinson's case, his sister Alexandra moves in to provide some "feminine influence," which, as Scout makes clear, comes with a strict behavioral code: "let any moral come along and she would uphold it; she was born in the objective case" (145, 146). But Aunt Alexandra is no replacement for Mrs. Finch, and Scout and Jem look to their father for their moral guidance instead of their often comical, exaggerated aunt. Importantly, despite their substantive number, the Ewell children also lack a mother, an absence that implicitly accounts for the family's miscreant behavior.

Primed with the absence of Scout's mother, we can read Lee's efforts to establish Atticus's moral leadership as both paternal (fatherly and legally) and maternal (relationally and morally). Just as Erdrich used a series of stylistically and structurally similar scenes to lead readers towards a particular potential of maternal care, so too, Lee crafts three parallel scenes to invite readers to enter a relationship between parent and child that invites an

investment in social change. Lee uses Atticus's defeat of the mad dog as an idealized model for how he might face the madness of the lynch mob and irrationality of the jury. She structures these three scenes in similar ways. Lee threatens the Finch family with a clear evil that manifests itself in a sort of madness: a rabid dog, a mob of angry men, and a prejudiced jury. As Carolyn Jones points out, "[l]ike the dog infected with rabies, the citizens of Maycomb are infected with Maycomb's "usual disease," racism, which makes them just as irrational and just as dangerous as Tim Johnson" (148).[42] Lee positions the Finches as the potential victims of the madness, which may be accurate in the case of the mad dog, but not necessarily in the cases of the lynch mob and trial. Further, all three scenes foreground Atticus and his children and renders the rest of the community as mute spectators. Even the in the jailhouse scene, which requires the most participation of others, members of the lynch mob have few lines. Just as Erdrich's series of dialogues simultaneously help Joe name the crime and shift readers into a particular relationship to him, Lee's scenes establish an evolution of recognition and understanding. In the mad dog scene, Scout and Jem come to an endearing recognition of their father's skill at marksmanship and his gentlemanly humility in not boasting about it. In the jailhouse scene, Scout's innocence calls Mr. Cunningham to recognize his commitments to children over the agenda of the mob. The third scene, the reading of the verdict, marks the first where Scout understands what's happening as it occurs—she has come to a mature recognition of how racism can foreclose justice. A closer reading of each of the three scenes shows how Lee not only helps her narrator acknowledge

[42] Jones continues, "Atticus's neighbors and friends, therefore, are those 'mad dogs' that he must confront" (148). Although Jones rightly connects these three scenes, like Scout, she mistakes the mob and the jury for people in Atticus's social sphere.

how racism structures her world, but also moves readers to want to change that prejudiced system.

While these three scenes are not as stylistically symmetrical as those I discussed from *The Round House*, Lee does emphasize their connection through Scout's semi-conscious reflections and "dreamlike quality," as Scout puts it in relation to the reading of the verdict (240). By describing these three important scenes as occurring in the liminal space between sleeping and waking, Lee positions Scout to make sophisticated connections between them. Although the mad dog scene occurs in broad daylight, it has surreal elements. Scout explains, "[i]n a fog, Jem and I watched our father take the gun and walk out into the middle of the street. He walked quickly, but I thought he moved like an underwater swimmer: time had slowed to a nauseating crawl" (109). The fog from which Scout and Jem spectate seems to be more figurative than literal, born out of their confusion as to why the sheriff trusts their father with the gun. Their nervousness, perhaps, slowed down his movements evoking the sense of nausea. The jailhouse scene, taking place around Scout's bedtime, also has subtle dreamlike attributes. Scout describes the members of the mob as materializing out of darkness, "[shadows] became substance as light revealed solid shapes moving toward the jail door" and, at Atticus's request, "they spoke in near-whispers" so as not to wake their potential victim (171). When Scout falls asleep after that encounter, she explicitly connects it to the showdown with the mad dog: "I was very tired, and was drifting into sleep when the memory of Atticus calmly folding his newspaper and pushing back his hat became Atticus standing in the middle of an empty waiting street, pushing up his glasses" (177). On the edge of sleep, Scout connects the threat of rabies to that of racism, but doesn't yet acknowledge that it was her own intervention that stopped the later. In the courtroom scene, Scout again

enters the liminal space between sleeping and waking to help readers see the parallels. Although she claims to be "reasonably awake," she also asserts that "in a dream I saw the jury return, moving like underwater swimmers, and Judge Taylor's voice came from far away, and was tiny" (240). She uses the same uncanny swimming adjective to describe the jury's return as she did to describe her father's walk into the street. Perhaps, Lee imagines both tasks—facing a rabid dog and returning a guilty verdict for an innocent man—harder than everyday life, so people doing them seem to struggle against something harder to move through than air.

The mad dog scene establishes the pattern that Lee sets the other two scenes against.[43] The chapter where Scout narrates this story, structured like the rest of Part I as an episodic childhood memory, creates an opportunity for recognition in the Aristotelian sense. Scout opens the chapter with resigned disappointment that her "feeble… nearly fifty" year-old father "did not do the things our schoolmates' fathers did" like playing football, hunting, drinking, or smoking (102). The film communicates this sentiment with adult Scout's voice-over narration: "Jem and I had to admit he was very good at that [explaining things], but that was all he was good at. We thought…." (41:17). This sets up an appetite, to borrow language from Kenneth Burke, in the audience that the children's naïve disappointment will be turn to respectful admiration of "the deadest shot in Maycomb County" (109). Lee has no

[43] The mad dog scene also resonates cruelly with the murder of Tom Robinson. In addition to the uncomfortable similarity of their names, the Sherriff's insistence that killing Tom Johnson is "a one-shot job" juxtaposes eerily with the seventeen shots that murdered Tom Robinson. I take up this connection in "Chapter Four: The Ethics of Killing Birds."

trouble establishing seven-year-old Scout's ignorance: Scout doesn't initially believe that it is a mad dog; she doesn't feel scared until Jem, Cal, and her neighbors have shut themselves inside; and, even then, most of her fear stems from her belief that her father can't shoot. When she finally recognizes her father's abilities, Jem has to explain that her pride should be accompanied with humility: "Atticus is real old, but I wouldn't care if he couldn't do anything—I wouldn't care if he couldn't do a blessed thing…. Atticus is a gentleman, just like me!" (113). In Jem's explanation, Atticus's primal action of protecting his young from a threat gains a social position in a gendered role at the top of a class hierarchy. What's more—the Maycomb community already recognized Atticus as the gentlemen Jem claims him to be, so the children's discovery of their father's abilities also marks a recognition of his role, and therefore their belonging, in the social group. Jem's relational assertion "like me" points both to Atticus's position in society and to his attachment to his father.

This scene gains its poignancy not only from Scout's change from ignorance to knowledge, but also because of the recursive rendering of care. Lee makes sure that the fear she conjures in her characters is not merely a fear *of* the rabid dog, but also a fear *for* each other, and the matrix constituted by these intentionally-directed emotions contribute more to the power of the scene than the threat of the dog itself. Atticus fears for his children just as they fear for him. While all the other adults hurry inside to protect themselves, Atticus rushes home and outside to protect his children. The first thing Atticus says upon arriving home is "[s]tay inside, son," and as the dog gets closer he directs Calpurnia inside also where "she tried to block Jem and me with her body, but we looked out from beneath her arms" (108). On the other end, Scout and Jem feel a variety of confused fears for their father. While they might feel scared that he's in the path of the rabid dog, they certainly worry that

he will make a fool of himself with the rifle. Scout describes the experience of these emotions in very physical terms. When Sherriff Tate first tries to give Atticus the rifle, Scout says "Jem and I nearly fainted" (109). In the film, actress Mary Badham captures Foote's stage directions "[i]n terror for her father" when she cries passionately, "Oh, no, Mr. Tate. He don't know how to shoot" (68). By now, Scout has not only adopted her neighbors' fear, but she also makes it clear that it's a fear for her father. When Atticus assuages all the fears by shedding his presumed feebleness and shooting the dog, we're not really relieved that the threat has been removed, but rather, we're touched by how the children's disappointment changes to awe. The emotion in this scene is not really directed at the dog, but rather twined up in a connection and care between parent and child and vice versa.

While the mad dog scene establishes a standard script of masculine heroics, the jailhouse scene makes some important shifts—Atticus takes on a more motherly role, and in place of the children's recognition of their father, Lee situates the mob's recognition of their civil social attachments. Before he's aware of his own children's presence, Atticus signals his shift from protector to caregiver by asking the lynch mob to speak quietly because Tom Robinson is sleeping, "he's asleep. Don't wake him up," a request that Mrs. Finch might have made of him when Jem and Scout were babies (171). While Atticus's decision to take this maternal role is radical, even queer, in the 1930's context when the novel is set or in the 1950's world in which it was written, his care is patronizing as it infantilizes a grown man. This gesture captures my critique and praise of the novel—on the one hand, Lee aspires to facilitate important social change, but even as she does it she maintains stereotypical racist hierarchies. When his offspring make their presence known, Atticus switches gears to keep them safe, imploring Jem to "[t]ake Scout and Dill home," that domestic place where they

also sought refuge from the mad dog (172). Unlike the mad dog scene where the parent protects his children, it's Scout and Jem's turn to protect their father. Scout does not register her father's fear or the seriousness of the situation. Although she observes "a flash of plain fear" in her father's eyes when she jumps into the scene, she herself feels "hot embarrassment" because the men are strangers (172). Jem, on the other hand, probably does and doesn't follow his father's instructions because he senses that he needs to protect his father more than he needs to protect his sister. Scout describes Jem's insubordination as a reflection of Atticus:

> As Atticus's fists went to his hips, so did Jem's and as they faced each other I could see little resemblance between them: Jem's soft brown hair and eyes, his oval face and snug-fitting ears were our mother's contrasting oddly with Atticus's graying black hair and square-cut features, but they were somehow alike. Mutual defiance made them alike. (173)

Just as Atticus positioned his body between the mob and his client, Jem is adamant in his desire to stay with his father. While Scout describes a behavioral similarity between her brother and her father, she emphasizes his resemblance to their mother, one of the few times she mentions her in the novel. Jem's posture mirrors that of the patriarch, but his face brings the maternal into the scene. The absence of the white woman's body sets aside the scripted pretense for lynching, but her presence in the form of her children activates a different sort of responsibility—that of parenting instead of protecting. While the mad dog scene sets up a performance of humble heroism, this scene emphasizes relationality—Jem is both his father and mother; Atticus must play both roles.

Scout's attempts at "livingroom talk" with Mr. Cunningham extend the familial attachment that Lee established between Atticus and his children to the relationship among generations in the social group. While Atticus demonstrated poise and bravery in the face of the rabid dog, Scout, oblivious to the tension around her, stays calm, even bored in the face of the racists. Scout's civil address calls the adult to switch gears from the mob mentality, heated with hate and alcohol, to the more mature man, one addressed respectfully by children. Scout begins by referencing the humble way Mr. Cunningham paid Atticus. The Cunningham family, as Scout explains in the second chapter, is well-known for their honorable trait that "they never took anything of anybody" (22). The eight-year-old's unintentional reminder of his indebtedness to her father who had provided him legal services in exchange for hickory nuts, smilax, holly, and turnip greens might have embarrassed him in front of his rural community. Whatever class hierarchy Scout unwittingly evokes does not move Mr. Cunningham to react. Acknowledging Atticus's former charity would have reasserted the patrician's power over the mob of country folk, who in this late-night encounter have the weight of numbers and the inertia of conservative traditions on their side. But, when Scout references her relationship to his son, also called Walter, "Mr. Cunningham was moved to a faint nod. He did know me, after all" (174). Scout's reference to little Walter may have reminded Mr. Cunningham that he has a smaller version of himself at home whom he cares about, just as Atticus's miniatures interposed themselves to protect their father. Simply by greeting him, Scout invites Mr. Cunningham to play a different part—that of a parent. When she asks him about his entailment and his son, he cannot respond with brusque retort of angry men. In order to understand the "peculiar thing" Mr. Cunningham did in response to Scout, readers must take the perspective of caring parents as well (175).

Lee emphasizes Mr. Cunningham's recognition of his possible-parent relationship to Scout through repeated size imagery. Even though Scout knows his name, she begins her first description of him with "[t]he big man" (174). Mr. Cunningham himself accounts for his size by "squatt[ing] down and [taking] me by both shoulders" (175). The film prolongs this moment of adult-child eye-to-eye engagement, by raising the jail door, so Atticus and his children stand a few steps above the crowd. While this allows Atticus to tower over the country folk, it places Scout on face level with Mr. Cunningham and his companions. In both the film and the novel, he closes the conversation with another reference to size "little lady," an epithet that both praises the maturity of Scout's civilities and recalls her role as a small child (175).

This is the most radical of Lee's scenes because the child's appeal calls the adults to inhabit roles of caregivers in their social system. Instead of protecting a myth, they must participate in the civility the child expects. While, in the mad dog scene, Scout stood next to Jem in wide-eyed awe of their father's marksmanship, Atticus, in this scene, stands side-by-side with Jem amazed by the effects of his daughter's small talk: Scout explains, "Atticus's mouth, even, was half-open, an attitude he had once described as uncouth" (174). Scout's lady-like attempts to force a conversation with Mr. Cunningham renders her father speechless leaving him with an ungentlemanly expression of awe. In addition to repositioning Mr. Cunningham from mob member to parent, Scout's civilities also call Atticus into his other role. Her conversation asks him to be not only the town lawyer who stands up for the possibility of fair trials, but also the father, who taught his daughter that "it was the polite thing to talk to people about what they were interested in, not about what you were interested in" (174). This scene shows how Ruddick's "maternal thinking" can lead to

non-violence. Recognizing their relationship to the child does make the mob go home. Scout's "child-thinking" reprograms the adult's script. Rather than following racist protocols the adults resume their roles as parents raising children to interact civilly and peacefully with each other.

Lee makes a further amendment to the pattern established in the mad dog chapter in its final iteration in the courtroom. The recognition this scene sounds is not encapsulated in the scene itself, but rather marks Scout's transition from ignorance of racism to the knowledge that it is strong enough to convict an innocent man. While Atticus can protect his children from the mad dog and Scout can call a mob to civility, in the courtroom, parent and child fail in the face of Maycomb's "usual disease." Although Atticus is as skilled an orator as he is a marksman, he could not win the case. Despite the fact that Scout "toy[s] with the idea of asking everyone below to concentrate on setting Tom Robinson free" and Jem is devastated by the verdict, neither can make a difference in that forum (239). Unlike the other two scenes, where either Scout or her father was surprised by the other's success, Scout describes watching the jury return the verdict as "like watching Atticus walk into the street, raise a rifle to his shoulder and pull the trigger, but all the time knowing that the gun was empty" (240). Scout and Atticus knew the whole time the jury would return a guilty verdict.

Like the previous two scenes, however, Lee couples the recognition with an emphasis on relationality. Lee juxtaposes the town's reverence for Atticus's attempt with Jem's disappointment in his father's failure. Unlike the mad dog scene, where the children's embarrassment turns to admiration, or the jailhouse scene where the adult's argument shifts to collective care, in the aftermath of the case, a good swath of the Maycomb mind maintains their respect for Atticus, while Jem wallows in confusion and sadness. The "angry tears" he

cries walking home from the courthouse transitions to a measured sulkiness the next day (242). Lee carefully inserts invitations to the readers in the space of this disappointment. As she comforts him, Miss Maudie suggests to Jem in words that echo her praise of Atticus's shooting "he's the only man in these parts who can keep a jury out so long in a case like that. And I thought to myself, well, we're making a step—it's just a baby-step, but it's a step" (246). Just as Jem identifies with his father after the mad dog scene, in response to Miss Maudie, he expresses an urgency to continue what his father has started "soon's I get grown—" (246). Atticus also holds high expectations for the progress in his son's future; he says to Jem "[i]f you had been on that jury, son, and eleven other boys like you, Tom would be a free man" (251). In the words of Miss Maudie and Atticus's comfort, Lee inserts not so subtle suggestions to readers that such progress can be seen in our lifetime: that we can, like Jem, make different choices than the adults that so disappointed him. Lee's first actual readers may have been children, as she herself was, in the very decade that the novel is set. As *Mockingbird* gets taught year after year, more and more children may feel the same imperative as Jem to "make up for heathen juries" when they "get grown" (246). While Erdrich's scenes push her readers to be more like Cappy, Lee encourages her readers to be gentlemen like Jem and Atticus who can help "our courts [become] the great levelers… [where] all men are created equal" as Atticus claimed in his closing remarks (233).

THE BLUEST EYE

> Those of us who nurture the lives of those children who are not supposed to exist, who are not supposed to grow up, who are revolutionary in their very beings are doing some of the most subversive work in the world.
>
> — Alexis Pauline Gumbs

While *The Round House* pushes readers towards legal change and *To Kill a Mockingbird* facilitates a shift in the cultural narrative of racial justice, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* exposes the way white supremacy infects all aspects of society with a violence that concentrates on its most vulnerable members. Morrison's understanding that systems of race, class, and gender intersect rendering Black women and girls especially vulnerable anticipates Crenshaw's pivotal theory of intersectionality. While Erdrich and Lee who create repeated scenes of potential attachment to position readers in relationship to their narratives, Morrison crafts complicated patterns that crumble in on themselves like a kaleidoscope to show how racism is both structural and interpersonal. Scenes of potential, and often refused or corrupted, maternal care proliferate throughout her oeuvre; recall Sethe's "rough choice" in *Beloved*, Eva Peace's immolation of Plum in *Sula*, or Mavis's murder of her twins in *Paradise*. In the very opening of her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison signals how she will focus her questions about the failures of maternal care in the frail, wounded bird figure of eleven-year-old Pecola Breedlove. Paula Gallant Eckard calls this a "grotesque inversion" of the maternal because "[r]ejected by her mother and raped by her father, Pecola gives birth prematurely to an infant whose death symbolizes her own failure to thrive" (38). Morrison provides important insight into her thought-process in a 1993 "Afterword" printed with many current versions of the novel. Morrison's self-reflection will inform my reading of her narrative structure. Morrison divides *The Bluest Eye* into four seasons and each has at least three distinct styles: her version of a Dick and Jane primer, which provides a subject, Claudia's sections, which create a narrative arc and omniscient sections, which fill out the community and Pecola. By attending in particular to the repeated scenes of maternal

(in)attention, we will see how Morrison connects broad social formations to individual interpersonal violence.

Some critics have argued that by prefacing the novel with a repeated, deranged recitation of the midcentury Dick and Jane reader (first in plain prose, then without capitalization or punctuation, and finally without spaces as well), Morrison alludes to a white ideal of normalcy "inappropriate" for Black families.[44] The removal of punctuation and then spacing draws attention to the fluidity with which the historical primer rendered a hetero-normative white family the norm and ideal. By pairing the opening allusion to Dick and Jane with Claudia's prologue that names, in child's terms, the novel's tragedy, Morrison does seem to establish a binary, but it's a relational one, where the terms don't just happen to be opposite, but are made so by the mechanics of dominance.

Instead of a binary, *The Bluest Eye* rotates between the childhood memories that Claudia narrates, omniscient expositions on the various members of the community, and the

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[44] As Andrea O'Reilly writes, "Families like the Breedloves in *The Bluest Eye* can never be a Dick and Jane family though they will continually aspire to achieve the ideal and forever measure their own selves against it. The primer in *The Bluest Eye* serves to emphasize the inappropriateness of this idea for black families and reminds us of the inevitable feelings of inferiority that come with not achieving what is presented as the ideal and normal way of life" (48). Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi argues that these opening paragraphs reflect three levels of black deviance from this white ideal: the proper prose paragraph correlates to Geraldine's family "a counterfeit of the idealized white family," the legible, but unpunctuated paragraph corresponds to the MacTeers and the unpunctuated unspaced paragraph reflects "utter breakdown of order among the Breedloves" (113).

Dick and Jane passages that preface them. By juxtaposing the water-color white family with the abject incest of the Breedloves, Morrison shows how the illusion of raced normalcy depends on the debasement of what she calls a "crippled and crippling" Black family (210). She shores up her claims about how the fairy-tale of white perfection requires racist defilement by making it clear in the novel's omniscient sections (titled with angry echoes of the Dick and Jane break-down) that white characters' perversion and manipulation cause the Breedloves' violence.[45] As soon as we begin the seasonal cycle that comprises the novel proper, however, we realize that Morrison pulls apart this binary to triangulate a third: Claudia's own family the MacTeers, a real ideal, who are closer to what Morrison imagines as "the average black family" of the 1940s and may be as Andrea O'Reilly suggests the "only one 'successful' nuclear family in all of Morrison's fiction" (210, 25). Morrison thus twines three strands together to create *The Bluest Eye*, forging the genre of the braided narrative. So even as the opening pages position Pecola opposite an idealized Jane, whose blue eyes she yearns to have, Morrison interjects Claudia, the third that releases the polar tension and makes the horrible story readable. By repeating similarly structured scenes of potential care for Pecola throughout these differently styled strands, Morrison makes her harsh indictment of the infectious relationality of racism.

In her 1993 "Afterword," Morrison describes how she intended the novel's fragmented structure both as a formal reflection of Pecola's unraveling and invitation to

[45] Cholly, who rapes his daughter, was not born perverse, but was perverted by the white spectators who converted his first invitation to sexual intimacy into a crude and violent performance. Further, she prevents Cholly's wife Pauline from leaving the abusive marriage by the controlling whim of a white woman who refuses to pay for Pauline's labor.

readers' participation and engagement. She explains that she wanted to "break the narrative into parts that had to be reassembled by the reader" (211). Almost all of *The Bluest Eye*'s pieces begin by centering on a seemingly disconnected story, but wend their way back to Pecola— Claudia starts each of her sections with an episodic childhood memory: her own illness, her hatred of Maureen Peal, Mr. Henry's molestation of Frieda, and the omniscient narrator's turns from the Breedlove's house and family dynamic, to the phenomenon of "sugar-brown Mobile girls," to Pecola's parents' backstories, and finally to Soaphead Church (82). By reassembling these parts, the reader might see more of what's happening to Pecola than any of the novel's characters. Even though the omniscient narrator discloses the novel's central tragedy, how Cholly rapes his daughter, we learn through Claudia's eavesdropping that Pecola's mother beat her afterward so badly that "she lucky to be alive herself," and, through Pecola's insane conversation with herself, we learn that Cholly violated her multiple times (189). The fragmented narratives reflect a shard of this violence, too horrible to be disclosed all at once. Morrison continues

> The shattered world I built (to complement what is happening to Pecola), its pieces held together by seasons in childtime and commenting at every turn on the incompatible and barren white family primer, does not in its present form handle effectively the silence at its center: the void that is Pecola's 'unbeing.' (215)

Morrison intended the novel's formal structure to mirror the world it narrates. The fragmented glimpses of Lorain's community as Pecola wanders through it in counterpoint with the "barren" reader, held together by Claudia's episodic memories and desire to understand the tragedy, do give a clear picture of how white supremacy structures a society

such that as Morrison says "something as grotesque as the demonization of an entire race could take root inside the most delicate member of a society: a child; the most vulnerable member: a female" (211). Although this narrative strategy does reflect the world that failed Pecola, it does not, according to Morrison's self-critique, adequately treat Pecola herself. Earlier in the "Afterword" Morrison acknowledges that breaking the story into parts was a failed solution to the problem that Pecola's destruction might "lead readers into the comfort of pitying her rather than into an interrogation of themselves for the smashing" (211). According to Morrison's own self-reflection, her novel helps readers to see the broken world, but not our complicity in it. In Morrison's critique, the novel helps readers understand the system, but not the role we play in it. Importantly, this failure has to do with the way Morrison's formal choices position us in relation to Pecola.

By treating "Autumn," as a pattern that repeats and refracts over the remainder of the novel, we can see how Morrison schools her readers to see the racism that structures our society. In the beginning, even in the prologue, with Claudia's voice, Morrison primes her readers with the childhood plea for attention. At the end of the novel, a more mature Claudia reflects "[n]o body paid us any attention, so we paid very good attention to ourselves," and her narration invites us to join the attentiveness of this sisterly intimacy (191). Claudia explains that if anyone asked her what she wanted for Christmas, she would answer with a desire not for an object but an experience:

> "I want to sit on the low stool in Big Mama's kitchen with my lap full of lilacs and to listen to Big Papa play his violin for me alone." The lowness of the stool made for my body, the security and warmth of Big Mama's kitchen, the

> smell of lilacs, the sound of music, and since, it would be good to have all of my senses engaged, the taste of a peach, perhaps, afterward. (22)

Claudia wishes for a sensual embrace. She imagines the warm atmosphere of her grandmother's kitchen holds her the way the stool seems crafted for her body, and her grandfather's music that might sound the same regardless of his audience gains significance when played just for Claudia.

In describing the barrier that divides Claudia's childhood experiences from Claudia maintains this aural quality: while adults barely see and never converse with the children, Claudia and her sister use what they hear to make sense of the grown-up world. When her parents welcome the new boarder, Mr. Henry, Claudia experiences her introduction as one of many in the catalogue of household features: "here is the bathroom; the clothes closet is here; and these are my kids, Frieda and Claudia; watch out for this window" (15). Further, she explains "[w]e didn't initiate talk with grown-ups; we answered their questions" (23). From this vantage of almost inanimate automatons, Claudia and Frieda can "listen to and watch out for their voices" gaining a particular kind of knowledge that's more emotional than cognitive (14). As Claudia explains "[t]he edge, the curl, the thrust of their emotions is always clear to Frieda and me. We do not, cannot, know the meanings of all their words for we are nine and ten years old. So we watch their faces, their hands, their feet, and listen for truth in the timbre" (15). Just as Joe did not understand the significance of the gas smell, but registers its emotional import because of his aunt's reaction, so too do Claudia and Frieda understand the affective valences of their parents' conversations even if they cannot follow the content. Morrison's present tense in this passage positions readers as Claudia's confidants—unlike

the adults in her fictional world we see and listen to her, but assuming that many actual readers are adults she needs to remind us of this gap of knowledge.

"Autumn's" opening scene, where Mrs. MacTeer nurses her daughter through a flu-like illness, establishes that Claudia receives a sort of love that cuts through this experienced divide. Claudia's mother is harsh and does abuse her children but serves as a realistic model of care—Eckard explains "Morrison does not idealize Mrs. MacTeer. Unlike the placid, unreal mother of the primer, Mrs. MacTeer is blunt bossy, and impatient" (42). Unable to understand that her mother "is not angry at me, but at my sickness," Claudia initially conflates the painful effects of the sickness with the rough way her mother rubs salve over her body (12). In a fevered extension of her heightened perception of adult voices, Claudia interprets her mother's frustration with her illness as a disappointment in her: "[s]he is talking to the puke, but she is calling it my name: Claudia" (12). As the fever breaks, however, our nine-year-old narrator recognizes her mother's love:

> Love, thick and dark as Alaga syrup, eased up into that cracked window. I could smell it—taste it—sweet musty, with an edge of wintergreen in its base—everywhere in that house. It stuck, along with my tongue, to the frosted windowpanes. It coated my chest, along with the salve, and when the flannel came undone in my sleep, the clear, sharp curves of air outlined its presence on my throat. And in the night, when my coughing was dry and tough, feed padded into the room, hands repined the flannel, readjusted the quilt, and rested a moment on my forehead. So when I think of autumn, I think of somebody with hands who does not want me to die. (12)

While Claudia experiences herself as a household fixture between the closet and the window, she also understands that her mother's love is just as central to the structure of their home, accounting even for the imperfections. The love seals the cracked window allowing enough warmth inside for a child to play at the window. Resonating with her Christmas wish, the love Claudia feels satisfies her sense of taste and smell and like her grandmother's kitchen her mother's love envelops her completely. Her mother's love is not just sweet, like syrup, but sticky; it clings to the inside and outside of her chest the way her tongue sticks to the window. The repeated imagery of hands, that both rubbed the salve on her body and re-tucked her in at night, emphasizes that Mrs. MacTeer's love is physical and emotional; her care not only ensures Claudia's survival, but also lets her daughter know she wants her to thrive.

This opening scene of maternal care creates both an appetite and a realistic model for what should happen for Pecola. At the close of both Claudia's section and "Autumn's" omniscient section, Pecola gets a taste of this sort of care. When Pecola has her first period, Mrs. MacTeer initially beats Frieda based on their white neighbor's accusation that they were "playing nasty," but quickly gathers all three in a hug when she realizes her mistake (30). This scene closes with what Claudia overhears as Mrs. MacTeer bathes Pecola: "[t]he water gushed, and over its gushing we could hear the music of my mother's laughter" (32). If Claudia is right that "the truth is in the timbre" of grown-up voices, then Mrs. MacTeer's musical enjoyment must communicate to Pecola some kind of affection and security, at least for a moment. The image of a mother bathing a child recalls scenes of childhood even though the reason for the bathing signals, as Claudia puts it "the little-girl-gone-to-woman," passage to adulthood (31). As the girls whisper in their bed about the child-bearing

capabilities that menstruation heralds, Pecola asks a question in negative echo to Claudia's earlier acknowledgement of the love that structures her house: "How do you do that? I mean how to you get somebody to love you?" (32). In *The Round House*, Bazil and Clemence were unable to answer Joe's questions about the gasoline because of their own relationship with Joe's mother, and here Claudia cannot answer Pecola because of her position as a child who feels her own mother's love the way she feels the warmth of her house as autumn turns to winter.

Just as Claudia's opening section ends with Pecola receiving a moment of the attention she so deeply needs, the omniscient pieces of "Autumn" conclude with a similar scene of positive attention. Although the omniscient narrator only allows that the prostitutes "didn't despise" Pecola, the terms of endearment they use to address her (Miss Marie's favorite foods) and the way they entertain her questions implies a deeper affection (51). While Claudia and Frieda never "initiate talk with grown-ups," Morrison uses the same verb to describe Pecola's habitual state with the prostitutes: "Pecola always took the initiative with Marie" (23, 52). Like Mrs. MacTeer's laughter, the prostitutes revelry creates a warm space where Pecola feels comfortable enough to lead conversation and not try to become invisible as she does in her own home. The invitation to care for the unwanted child that Morrison sounds in the first chapter gets repeated over the course of the novel, but only in "Autumn" do characters accept that invitation.

The narrative structure of "Autumn" creates a pattern where the MacTeers become a more realistic counterpoint to the Breedlove's extremity than the make-believe of Dick and Jane. The novel's four sections alternate between potential maternal care and potential care among friends. "Autumn" and "Spring" begin with the MacTeers demonstrating good care

of their own children, nursing Claudia through her sickness and running Mr. Henry out of the neighborhood because he molested Frieda. This protective parenting sets a standard from which Pecola's care falls short; while in "Autumn" Pecola receives good foster care from the MacTeers and positive attention from the prostitutes, in "Spring" she suffers abuse from her mother and violation from her father. Morrison balances the "Autumn" and "Spring" scenes of potential maternal care with "Winter" and "Summer" opportunities for a radical sort of "mothering ourselves." In "Fall," Frieda intervenes in the school-yard bullying protecting Pecola from the boy's mean taunts although in the omniscient section a boy's invitation to play turns into scapegoating her for the killing of the cat. In "Summer," Claudia and Frieda also hope to care for Pecola through the adult problems that have been thrust upon her that they learn about through cruel gossip. While the sisters were able to stand up for Pecola in the schoolyard, they cannot protect her from the cruel life. In place of the omniscient section for this final season, Morrison crafts a dialogue between Pecola and an imagined friend because as Morrison explains in the "Afterword," "[s]he is not *seen* by herself until she hallucinates a self. And the fact of her hallucination becomes a kind of outside-the-book conversation" (215). Thus, the whole novel can be read as variations on theme of maternal care established in "Autumn."

Morrison restages the menstrual scene that closes Claudia's first section at the end of her third when Pecola spills the berry cobbler, and this image of Pecola bleeding between her legs reverberates painfully throughout the novel. The blood that marks the hopeful rite of passage becomes signal of the wrong of rape and finally facilitates the tragedy of miscarriage. Through the cobbler scene, Morrison creates a role for Mrs. Breedlove in this sad trajectory. Eckard also connects the scene of Pecola's first period with the cobbler

accident, "[n]ot unlike the menstrual fluids of the earlier image, the hot purple juice splatters on Pecola's legs" (48). Like the earlier scene, Claudia and Frieda find themselves alone with their friend except for the judging eyes of a white child, who gets to call Mrs. Breedlove "Polly, when even Pecola called her mother Mrs. Breedlove" (108). In place of the menstrual blood on the MacTeer's porch steps, Morrison covers the floor of the Fisher's kitchen with the just-cooked berries from the cobbler. Just as Mrs. MacTeer's first reaction was to whip her girls for "playing nasty," Mrs. Breedlove "in one gallop" begins to beat Pecola, but Mrs. Breedlove does not realize her error the way Mrs. MacTeer does (30, 109). Instead, she continues to abuse her burned daughter, and where Mrs. MacTeer's anger gives way to comforting laughter, Mrs. Breedlove's hatred rides the timbre of her voice; Claudia describes her shouts, "[h]er words were hotter and darker than the smoking berries, and we backed away in dread" (109). Morrison does not only juxtapose Mrs. Breedlove's abuse with Mrs. MacTeer's care, but she also interposes "pink-and-yellow-girl," colored in the simple contrast reminiscent of the Dick and Jane opening, in between Pecola and her mother (109). While Mrs. Breedlove physically and verbally bashes her own daughter, she comforts the white girl with what Claudia describes as "honey in her words [that] complemented the sundown spilling on the lake" (109). Importantly, Mrs. Breedlove's is not a complete failure of maternal care—her ability to soothe the white child while abusing her own indicates an awful redirection of that capacity.

Just as the closing omniscient section of "Autumn" repeats the care Mrs. MacTeer extends to Pecola, the omniscient sections of "Spring" echo and magnify this abuse. First, "SEEMOTHER" traces the history that traps Mrs. Breedlove in an abusive marriage with Cholly, a violent life she tries to paper over with her service to the Fishers. Second,

"SEEFATHER" narrates Cholly's abandonment as a baby, the death of his caregiver Aunt Jimmy, and finally his father's refusal to recognize him, a rejection that causes the adolescent to regress to infancy, losing control of his bowels and crying in fetal position for hours. While "SEEMOTHER" ends with Cholly's routine violation of his wife ("*[m]ost times he's thrashing away inside me before I'm woke*" (131)), "SEEFATHER" concludes with Cholly raping his daughter. Morrison interposes the mother's face in the father's violence: "when the child regained consciousness, she was lying on the kitchen floor under a heavy quilt, trying to connect the pain between her legs with the face of her mother looming over her" (163). Through this disconcerting image, Eckard explains that Morrison "merges the maternal and paternal violations Pecola suffers" (50). While in Lee and Erdrich's novels the father tries to fill the space of this missing mother, in Morrison's scene the mother furthers the harm caused by the father. Morrison dedicates so much time to these parental backstories not to excuse their abusive behavior but to show how it is made possible, and even encouraged, by a society structured by white supremacy. As Morrison writes in the "Afterword," she tried to connect "Cholly's 'rape' by the whitemen to his own of his daughter" (215). Earlier she showed how Mrs. Breedlove could not escape from her abusive relationship with Cholly because she did not have the money or support to do so. In a world where the parental figures cannot protect themselves, they channel their impotence into violence on the body of what they can control.

The Bluest Eye is not only about the awful extent to which a family can crumble, but also about the potential for friendship embraces Lorde's imperative to "mother ourselves." When the adult Claudia reflects on her lack of attention as a child, she asserts that since the adults couldn't attend to her as much as she needed, she and her sister "paid very good

attention to ourselves" (191). As children, the sisters extend this care to Pecola as well, but, as they mature, they join the collective dismissal of the wronged child. "Autumn" establishes this initial friendship: when Pecola gets her first period, Claudia and Frieda try to care for before Mrs. MacTeer intervenes and as they sleep the sisters help Pecola understand the significance of this physical change. In "Winter," Frieda follows through with the commitments of friendship by intervening when the boys taunt Pecola. Although Frieda's act of kindness bears traces of her mother's care (she breaks up the circle of boys with "with set lips and Mama's eyes" (66)), the sisters' relationship with Pecola does not imply a privileged hierarchy. They play tea with Pecola as equals and Claudia expects Maureen Peal to treat them all equally to ice cream. Upon learning about the adult difficulties that have been thrust on their friend, Frieda and Claudia "could think of nothing but our own magic" and attempt to use childhood enchantments to ensure the healthy birth of Pecola's child (5). Even though the sisters can see through the adult misconceptions that blame Pecola just as quickly as they worship Shirley Temple, because they are children, they cannot be the friends Pecola needs. Instead, witnessing Pecola's demise causes their loss of innocence, but, in their maturation, they join their community in using Pecola as the negative to define themselves against. Claudia explains,

> All of us—all who knew her—felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made us think we had a sense of humor. Her inarticulateness made us believe we were eloquent. Her poverty kept us generous. Even her waking dreams we used—to silence our own nightmares.

> And she let us, and thereby deserved our contempt. We honed our egos on her, padded our characters with her frailty, and yawned in the fantasy of our strength. (205)

Like illustrated fantasy of the Dick and Jane primer, Claudia explains how she came to understand her own wholesome identity in contrast to Pecola's defilement. In Claudia's explanation her positive traits are not only made clear in light of Pecola's failures, but actually depend on them. The collective claim of beauty spreads its legs on top of Pecola's assumed ugliness. Pecola's negative attributes become the agents of Claudia's sentences causing her positive characteristics. Importantly, these are not the musings of the naïve nine-year-old we have followed throughout the novel. Rather, they reflect the insights of the person Claudia has become, the adult who can see how society's failure to care for her friend can make possible the very way we define ourselves.

For me, this is the reason why Morrison's self-critique holds; readers remain as Morrison says "touched but not moved" (211). Although she creates complicated scenes that compel readers to see the awful failure of care and potential for friendship, she ultimately forecloses it for Pecola. The repeated, refracting scenes of maternal care and rejection do help readers see the complicated affective way racism permeates society, but it does not position us to intervene. Instead of gradually shaping the reader into a particular relation, like Erdrich and Lee do, Morrison shifts us from Claudia's stories to the omniscient observations. Thus, we may pity Pecola like Claudia does or volunteer an anger that Pecola cannot feel as Linda Wagner-Martin suggests, but we do not take up a role next to her as we

might with Joe.[46] Morrison positions Claudia almost as a blood-sister to Pecola in the sense that she washes her menses off the porch steps and witnesses Pecola in some moments of rejection, but she cannot be her friend after Pecola's ultimate violation. Claudia and Frieda pity Pecola, but they can neither discuss the rape with her, as they did with her first period, nor help her because of the social ostracization the adults forced on her. So, just as Claudia learned to hide her hatred of Shirley Temple in a "fraudulent love," she learns to bury her attachment to Pecola in a socially-imposed scorn (23). Although Claudia and Frieda want to care for their friend, they cannot, and Pecola hallucinates one into existence, a desperate and brilliant act. Even as the child's reason breaks, she creates what she needs most: an affirming confidant. Unlike the dialogue in *The Round House* that creates an inviting opening for readers to enter the text, this conversation between a fragmented self bars readers from the scene causing us to question what we have already read: the pain of the rape gets compounded by its repetition and the poignancy of the wish for blue eyes sharpens with the false belief of its fulfillment. While in *The Round House* we knew the answers to Joe's poignant questions, the dialogue between Pecola and her hallucinated self reveals more to us than we already knew. Morrison's scenes position readers finally, as Claudia's confidants, as distant witnesses to the violence enacted on Pecola. We leave the novel with a deeper understanding of the affective avenues of racism, but Morrison offers us no clear way out. The damage is done. As Claudia concludes the novel, "it's much, much, much too late"

[46] Wagner-Martin posits that Pecola "should be angry at everyone around her, but instead, Morrison asks the reader to supply Pecola's anger. What stems from the carefully-constructed scenes of harmful insult is the reader's anger at injustice unremedied, or of social deprivation to which there is neither answer nor remedy" (17).

(206). Unlike Mockingbird which ends with the hope of when Jem grows up or *The Round House*, which ends with an action list of how readers can advocate against sexual violence, *The Bluest Eye* ends on the defeatist note of damage done too late to be redeemed.

CONCLUSION

Erdrich, Lee, and Morrison all channel the radical potential of mothering to foreground the social issues they want to address. Erdrich and Lee craft a series of scenes, similar in style and structure, to move readers into a particular position in relation to their characters and conflicts. Morrison, on the other hand, "mount[s] a series of rejections, some routine, some exceptional, some monstrous," as she explains to share with her readers an incisive analysis of how racism infects society (210-211). In all three novels, authors activate readerly expectations for maternal care that facilitate an investment in characters and open up a potential for social change. Rather than using traditional familial formations to reproduce social norms, Erdrich, Lee, and Morrison use the potential attachment between a maternal figure and a vulnerable child-narrator to facilitate a legal change in the case of *The Round House*, an amendment to the cultural narrative of lynching in *Mockingbird*, and an improvement in racial analysis in *The Bluest Eye*. This chapter traced the ways that a child-narrator can invite a particular emotional investment that helps readers imagine social change. The next chapter will put the cognitive affordances of child-narrators into conversation with Critical Race Theory's knowledge of racial formation to grapple with the particular shifts these writers imagine.

CHAPTER THREE: "HEY, MR. CUNNINGHAM"

> Atticus said nothing. I looked around and up at Mr. Cunningham, whose face was equally impassive. Then he did a peculiar thing. He squatted down and took me by both shoulders.
>
> "I'll tell him you said hey, little lady," he said.
>
> Then he straightened up and waved a big paw. "Let's clear out," he called. "Let's get going, boys."
>
> —Scout Finch, *To Kill A Mockingbird* (175)

"A Child's Call" is an extended effort to understand what it is about the appeal of an eight-year-old that can cause an adult to call off a lynch mob. The previous chapter worked to make palpable the affective pull, the imperative to care that can arise between a potential parent and a child. This chapter turns to the cognitive mechanisms that not only enable characters to make this rational and caring choice but also allows readers to believe and enjoy it. Ultimately, Mr. Cunningham "did a peculiar thing" because Harper Lee wanted him to, and readers buy it because we also want social obligations to children to supersede supremacist calls to violence. Published in the wake of the murder and mutilation of Emmett Till, the crime that civil rights worker Amzie Moore called "the best advertised lynching," *Mockingbird* provides a cognitive framework to rethink Southern ethics (cited in Wood 266). Through Scout's admiration of her father, Lee creates an aspirational figure for hopeful white liberals to attach to, and through the child's education she relegates the evils of racism to white "trash." As Colin D. Pearce writes, "*To Kill a Mockingbird* is the literary face that the South has turned toward the world since 1960" (268). This is an important feat given that the alternative might have been framed by the original rhetoric of George Wallace. Although

Lee's amendments to the cultural narrative leave racial hierarchies intact and emphasize class divisions, she does foster a desire and create an imaginary role for someone to simultaneously be white and want equality before the law. As cultural critic Naa Baako Ako-Adjei says, Lee's novel "was the literary expression of the position of the white moderate" (195). *Mockingbird* represents what Miss Maudie might describe as "it's just a baby-step, but it's a step" (246). For me, *Mockingbird* is meaningful not because of the shift it made in this cultural narrative, but because of *how* the novel made it. Even though Lee's analysis of race and class is lacking, she crafts a particular kind of narrator, a child whose innocence in the hands of a sophisticated writer can make a nation pause, like Mr. Cunningham did, and reconsider the way we think.

Louise Erdrich and Toni Morrison's child-narrators make similar, if more sophisticated, shifts in how readers interpret the actual world. While *Mockingbird* depends on readers filling in a cultural narrative that the child does not know, *The Bluest Eye* exposes the way seemingly innocuous cultural values—such as the adoration of Shirley Temple—create damaging standards that renders some violence invisible. *The Round House* traverses the terrain between a crime thriller and an Amnesty International report to raise readers' awareness about an epidemic of sexual violence against Native women. All three novels rely on readers' ability to fill in what the child cannot name—a national myth, the double violation of incest, or the horrible potential of rape and murder. Because readers infer these things, we imagine them in our language and on our terms. Even as readers supply the content of this supplemented material, the authors use their child-narrators to shift the interpretive strategies through which we read it. These novels are thus built through asymmetrical exchanges—on the one hand, these authors rely on readers who know more

than the young narrators can articulate, but on the other hand, the readers rely on the children for information about the story and how to read it. Through this asymmetrical collaboration between narrator who knows what happened and reader who knows what it means, Lee, Morrison, and Erdrich might not change *what* we think but they do influence *how* we think it.

The argument of this chapter rests on three assumptions. First, in the United States we share a cultural and literary imaginary. While different racial and ethnic groups certainly have different sets of knowledges, unique literary canons, and, perhaps, different imaginaries, to an important extent we also share an imaginary that allows us to understand ourselves as members of the same nation in the sense of Benedict Anderson. In *Imagined Communities* (1983), Anderson delineated how newspapers and novels, among other things, played a major role in the modern turn to nation-states because both print genres helped readers imagine a wider sense of interconnection. Toni Morrison takes up a facet of this shared imaginary through her interrogation of "our national literature" and "*the* literary imagination" in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1993) (emphasis added 5). Morrison understands that "for both black and white American writers, in a wholly racialized society, there is no escape from racially inflected language" and (14). Morrison knows that literature is both confined by and contributes to the racialized assumptions encoded in language, and her wider project traces how literary constructions of whiteness via an "Africanist presence" accrue into tired yet revealing assumptions about identity in the United States. Although Morrison doesn't address *Mockingbird* in her book, the shallow character Lee creates for Tom Robinson demonstrates Africanism because, like some of the cases in Morrison's study, he is the crux that makes possible the interiority and facilitates the

development of white characters: he enables Atticus to become a hero and Scout and Jem to come of age.

Second, there is a porous boundary between the cultural imaginary and literary imaginary. Morrison's argument affirms this as well: "[n]ational literatures, like writers get along the best way they can, and with what they can. They do seem to end up describing and inscribing what is really on the national mind" (14). In this formulation, the concerns of the nation become the fabric of the writers' craft, and the particular way an author chooses to work with that material further inscribes those anxieties or can shift them. Morrison interrogates the historic concern of U.S. literature with "the architecture of a new white man" and I focus on contemporary authors who try to address more consciously the way racism and rape continue to plague our society (15). Rape, real and imagined, is the act that ignites the plot of these novels; the mob in *Mockingbird* seeks vengeance for an imagined crime; *The Bluest Eye* renders real incest and rape as a potential consequence racialized social structures; and *The Round House* testifies to the ongoing predation of Native women by white men. These authors' focus on rape draws attention to that mode's of violence pivotal role in maintaining racist hierarchies; slave-owners increased their "property" and shored up their power and settlers affirmed their nation through rape. Morrison has dedicated her literary career to liberating language, and in so doing liberating society "from its [language's] sometimes sinister, frequently lazy, almost always predictable employment of racially informed and determined chains" (xi). Although writers work in a pre-constructed field of material, they can, like Morrison, work to loosen and shift racially inflected language.

The third assumption relies on Carl Gutiérrez-Jones's opening argument in *Critical Race Narratives: A Study of Race, Rhetoric, and Injury* (2001). Gutiérrez-Jones- observes,

"people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds tend to read race and racism in ways that are crucially at odds" or, for my purposes here: although we share a cultural and literary imaginary—the sequence of events that comprise our cultural narratives are the same—, people from different backgrounds read and interpret that imaginary's constituent narratives very differently (1). Gutiérrez-Jones makes his point through a careful analysis of the 1999 acquittal of the NYPD officers who murdered Amadou Diallo by shooting him forty-one times and an attention to its similarities with the trial of the LAPD officers to brutally beat Rodney King in 1992. Gutiérrez-Jones reveals the interpretive practices implicit in these decisions: The trial rhetoric subordinated the personhood of the victim to the projection-as-threat on the part of the officers; The emphasis on the officers' split-second decision making in the face of this threat, shored up in the King trial by "breaking up the videotape of the assault into individual photographic stills" (4); And the mandate for the jury to sympathize with the accused, an imperative explicitly issued in the Diallo case where the judge directed jurors, as Gutiérrez-Jones explains "to put themselves in the officers' shoes and view the world as they viewed it" (5). These juries' bad decisions are not only a result of a racial prejudice, but also a reflection of "the receptiveness that jurors have for certain kinds of narrative tactics, and the caution they might exercise toward other kinds" (Gutiérrez-Jones 5). The discrepancy in the public responses to these trials, as Gutiérrez-Jones notes, reflects that this racially marked divide in reading strategies extends far outside the courtroom.

In addition to the work of revealing how different readerships interpret shared events so differently, Gutiérrez-Jones's argument about difference between ignorant and race-conscious reading strategies is central to this chapter because the discrepancies he identifies belong in a particular ethical register—the rule of law--the "right" of police officers to wield

deadly force, the ability of the justice system to "see" racial bias, the different collective assumptions about guilt and innocence. It is in this realm that Gutiérrez-Jones locates the insight of race-conscious readers: "minorities recognize in some [narrative practices] racially vexed material which taints the justice system" (5). In other words, because of their lived experiences in the United States, people of color can see how the justice system is not blind (except, often, to white people's guilt), but instead perpetuates the racial hierarchy even while proclaiming formal equality. Concentrating in the world of literary texts, Peter Rabinowitz has helped us understand that reading strategies are born from readers' previous encounters with other literary texts—readers know what to notice, how to draw significance from those details, how to configure those patterns in meaningful ways, and how to think all these different parts into coherence because of how these rules functioned in texts read earlier. Rabinowitz's argument accords with Morrison's interest in the literary imagination—regular readings of texts deemed canonical create conventions, such as the repeated use of Black characters or dark imagery to underscore white character's ethical dilemmas which Morrison designates as Africanism, that readers can read and interpret more easily each time we encounter them. Because the difference between our cultural and literary imagination is so small, the reading strategies we use to apprehend cultural events that Gutiérrez-Jones discusses might be one and the same as the reading strategies we use to make sense of literary texts. If we take Rabinowitz's point that encountering texts form our reading strategies seriously, then reading writers like Morrison, who strive to "unhobble the imagination from the demands of [racially inflected] language" might help us develop interpretative strategies both for fictional texts and cultural narratives (13).

Throughout "A Child's Call" I have held ethics open as a concept that grasps the pull between people, the tension between a crying infant and a potential caregiver, a field of possibility, of responsibility between a self and another or many others because this matrix of relationally underlies specific ethical choices. Although Morrison, Lee, and Erdrich accomplish their political and aesthetic projects precisely by the way they write this tension, the political triumphs of their works can be captured in what Adam Zachary Newton criticizes as "moral paraphrase." In this chapter, I want to think together the crib note version of these authors' moral interventions and the ethical complexities that underlie them, making them possible. Importantly, as Gutiérrez-Jones understands, changes in interpretative strategies are most marked for white and ignorant readerships; racially aware audiences probably already practice these interpretive strategies. Because, as Morrison pointed out in 1993, "regardless of the race of the author, the readers of virtually all of American fiction have been positioned as white" and because, as Gutiérrez-Jones has shown, white ignorant reading strategies are responsible for much injustice, it is important to trace how these strategies can change (xii). Further, just as Morrison and Rabinowitz understand that recurring imagery and conventions create readerly expectations, race-conscious readers may have their strategies affirmed by widespread appreciation of these novels. Before *To Kill A Mockingbird*, the master narrative of lynching assumed that Black men rape white women—after *Mockingbird* our literary imagination presumes Black men, when emplotted in this story, innocent.[47] This shift certainly resulted from years of Black activism, and below

[47] Even as I claim this as a shift, I recognize that lynchings still occur and that the national imaginary still profile Black men as guilty. I think the shift manifests itself both in the

we'll see that *Mockingbird*'s contribution is more complicated than I rendered it here, but Lee's novel nonetheless played an important role in this moral revision of the way we read lynching narratives. Further, before the 1970 publication of Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, it was easy to imagine racism as the individual, albeit pervasive, prejudice of white people. After her novel, and the decades of Critical Race Theory that her text preceded and accompanied, it is much easier for readers to understand how white supremacy both manifests as individual bias *and* structures society in damaging ways, channeling violence onto the bodies of its most vulnerable members. Significantly, Morrison's understanding of how white supremacy can damage women and girls in different ways than men anticipates Kimberlé Crenshaw's thesis on intersectionality. Finally, in 2012 when Louise Erdrich published and won the National Book Award for *The Round House*, white men could rape Native women on tribal land without legal consequences because tribal courts could not try non-Native people for major crimes. In 2013, partly as a result of Erdrich's activist prose, Congress renewed the Violence Against Women Act with a provision that extends tribal jurisdiction in some limited cases of sexual violence. Erdrich's novel not only raises awareness about this issue, but also exposes the complicity of federal Indian Law with white male predators. I'm not claiming that these authors single-handedly effected these changes—of course, these important shifts are the result of decades if not centuries of struggle both in the streets and in institutional settings. I argue that through these novels, Lee, Morrison and Erdrich not only "describe[] … what is on the national mind," but also

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aesthetic realm and in the still-too-small group of people who understand how the justice and the executive branches conspire to convict people of color.

"inscribe," to recall Morrison's language, these significant changes in how we ought to read and interpret events.

The way that these three novels make such important shifts in the way we read depends on a cognitive collaboration between the reader and the child-narrator. James Phelan, who wrote the book on character narration, asserts that it "is an art of indirection: an author communicates to her audience by means of the character narrator's communication to a narratee" (1). Everything readers can know about the storyworld, characters, and plot gets funneled through the perspective of a particular character. Phelan notes that narrators have two types of telling functions: narrator functions and disclosure functions; he writes, "the narrator acts as reporter, interpreter, and evaluator of the narrated for the narratee" (12). In Phelan's schema reporting involves telling what happened, interpreting involves drawing conclusions based on what happened, and evaluating or regarding involves making ethical judgments about those events. For instance, in *Mockingbird* Scout reports that a crowd of men smelling "of stale whiskey and pigpen" showed up at the Maycomb County Jail, but she does not interpret this congregation as a lynch mob nor judge it as a racist and wrong assemblage. Phelan accounts for this sort of communication by explaining that narrators can also serve "disclosure functions" where "the narrator unwittingly reports information of all kinds to the authorial audience" (12). In my example, Lee uses Scout successfully to disclose to readers that there is a lynch mob even though the child does not know what that is. Phelan uses the discrepancy between the implied author's version of events and the narrator's account of those events to define six types of unreliability. Characters can either fail (add the prefix mis-) or underperform (add the prefix under-) along the three axes of

communication Phelan identifies. In Lee's scene, Scout underinterprets and misevaluates the crowd that she accurately reports.

Lee, Morrison, and Erdrich derive the power of their child-narrators from requiring readers to fill in what the child cannot know. These young narrators reliably report scenes, but because of their innocence cannot fully interpret the events they narrate. In *Mockingbird*, *The Bluest Eye*, and *The Round House*, readers must supplement the child's account with knowledge of rape and racism. *Mockingbird* relies on the myth that Black men rape white women even as it seeks to alter that story. *The Bluest Eye* opens with what Morrison categorizes as the "shocking information" of incest, a horror her young narrator cannot grasp because she does not yet know where babies come from. *The Round House* begins with a rape and attempted immolation the narrator discloses but struggles to name because he cannot register the hatred implicit in this violence. These three novels hinge on readers' knowledge of this sexual and racialized violence and our ability complete what these narrators only partly say. The assumption of innocence that serves as the essential foundation for these novels and others like them is not a mimetic argument but a moral one. Children can and do know and experience this type of violence as attested by many memoirs such as Elie Wiesel's *Night* (1954), Anne Moody's *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (1968), Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), and Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* (1992). Both these memoirs and to a greater extent these novels rely not on the reality that children have known these types of aggression, but on the moral desire that children not have to. Readers set aside the historical fact that, as Ako-Adjei reminds us, children of Scout's age often participated in lynch mobs because we want to imagine that they didn't. This human capacity for destruction belongs in a different category than other

knowledges that we also tend to censor from children. Knowledge of rape and racism is not the inevitable discovery of sex or death that coming of age usually denotes. While all young might grow up to discover the pleasures of carnal knowledge or the pain of loss, the desire for annihilation that underlies both rape and lynching are things we want to be able to protect children from both knowing and experiencing. The first intervention of *Mockingbird*, *The Round House*, and *The Bluest Eye* is inviting readers to join in the assumption that the violence they narrate is too wrong for children's minds. In this sense, readers may empathize with characters who cannot bring themselves to explain the violence to the children such as Joe's Aunt Clemence or his father who cannot communicate to the child why his mother smelled like gas.

Even as readers can fill in the violence these writers tell from our own knowledge of what hatred is possible in the world, we rely on these child-narrators to provide the details about how this social violence manifests itself in the particular instance of this story community. At the same time as we want to protect the character that represents a possible child from knowing about these forms of annihilation, we need the "synthetic" child that narrates to speak the story for us, which paradoxically makes the horrors they narrate easier to bear.[48] Morrison writes about the juxtaposition between the childish description of marigolds and the adult understanding of incest in *The Bluest Eye*, "[t]he reader is thereby

[48] Phelan distinguishes three types of "character functions." First, "mimetic functions," which he describes as "the ways in which characters work as representations of possible people," second, "synthetic functions" which includes how characters work "as artificial constructs within the larger construct of the work," and, finally, "thematic functions" which grasps how characters can stand " as representative of larger groups or ideas" (12).

protected from a confrontation too soon with the painful details, while simultaneously provoked into a desire to know them" (213). Even as readers wish children did not have to know "the painful details," in Morrison's analysis, the child's perspective protects the reader also from knowing those details "too soon" (213). In this way these novels rely on unspoken agreement between the author and reader: we will fill in what the child should not know even as the child reveals this knowledge to us. Morrison writes, "the opening provides the stroke that announces something more than a secret shared, but a silence broken, a void filled, an unspeakable thing spoken at last" (214). What we agree children should not know becomes bearable by communal knowing, communal speaking. We participate in the breaking of the silence by meeting the child part way in their report and filling in with our adult knowledge what we do not want them to have to say.

In the process of filling in what the child cannot say, readers learn along with the child how we ought to interpret, or as Phelan would say "regard" or "evaluate," the content of what we supply. Through these interpretive lessons that the child-narrators receive and give, authors can enact a second ethical intervention: they train their readers in particular reading strategies. Because we have supplied the content of the unspoken, we do not get caught up in what happened and instead can be influenced on how to read it. Readers intuit the intent of Mr. Cunningham's mob; we understand why Geraldine smelled like gas, and we know the violence through which Pecola conceived "her father's baby" (5). The surety of these inferences leaves open how we ought to interpret these events. For this, we rely heavily on what the child knows and learns. Scout learns from her father behavioral codes that hope for a post-race world, but at the same time she sprinkles her narrative with a skewed Southern history. Joe also learns from his father about the exclusive sights of the

justice system and draws logical conclusions about what the law will fail to see. As Claudia comes to understand what happened to Pecola, Morrison helps readers see the social structures that can make it possible for a father to direct that awful violence onto the body of his little girl. By requiring readers to fill in what their narrators disclose and asking us to interpret it along the lines of the children, Lee, Erdrich, and Morrison shift our interpretative strategies.

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

> If our democracy is to work the way it should in this increasingly diverse nation, then each one of us needs to try to heed the advice of a great character in American fiction, Atticus Finch, who said "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view. Until you climb into his skin and walk around in it."
>
> —President Barack Obama's "Farewell Address"

In many ways, *To Kill a Mockingbird* has done for the United States what Scout did for the lynch mob in the example that opens "A Child's Call." Just as Scout's pleasantries interrupt the masculine tension and postpone the racist violence, Lee's narrative—both in her 1960 novel and the 1962 film adaptation—arrests audiences, in and outside the storyworld, with an imperative to empathize as Atticus's adage advises. Just as Atticus claims that Scout's naïve greeting unwittingly "made Walter Cunningham stand in my shoes for a minute," teachers have used the novel, for half a century, to teach children, especially eighth graders, empathy (179). This ethical work resonates with the novel's widespread acclaim. In *English Journal*, Michael Milburn called the novel "a Holy Grail among English teachers" because it's "a book that most, if not all students will like, discuss with enthusiasm, and

remember fondly" (90). *Mockingbird* was "far and away [the] first choice" of Library Journal's librarian's top books of the 20th century.[49] But it's not just teachers and librarians that recognize *Mockingbird*'s power. The novel won the Pulitzer Prize in Fiction in 1961, and the film won three academy awards including best actor for Gregory Peck who played Atticus, a character later recognized by the American Film Institute as the "top movie hero… of all time." When Harper Lee won the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2007, President George Bush claimed, "*To Kill a Mockingbird* has influenced the character of our country for the better." President Barack Obama proposes that the successful functioning of a democracy in a nation as diverse as the U.S. depends on "heeding" Atticus's advice. In addition to this pedagogic, aesthetic, and federal recognition, *Mockingbird* has been embraced by the legal and medical professions. The American Bar Association honored the novel on its 50th anniversary. In recommendation of the acknowledgment attorney Clark Cooper wrote, "[t]aken as a whole, the influence of *To Kill A Mockingbird* and of Atticus Finch on us, as lawyers, is remarkable…. Atticus Finch encourages us to supplant our cynicism and malaise with integrity and empathy. We, as a profession, are better because of Atticus Finch" (Podgers 55). James Podgers, the managing editor for the American Bar Association Journal, further asserts that *Mockingbird* is "[a]rguably is the most beloved American novel written in the 20th century" and "Atticus Finch, perhaps the ultimate role

[49] The Library Journal created their list in response to the Modern Library's list, "100 Best Novels," claiming that "your top titles reflect more of the books that people actually read that those they feel they should have read" (34). John M. Gist points out that British librarians also acclaim the novel; he writes, "[i]n 2006, British librarians ranked *To Kill A Mockingbird* as the most recommended book in the world, the bible coming in second" (248).

model for lawyers seeking to find their ethical bearings an increasingly harsh legal environment" (57).[50] Further, in *The American Journal of Medicine*, Doctors Darryl Potyk and Judy Swanson call the novel a "clarion call for racial and social justice." Across the board, Americans recognize *To Kill A Mockingbird* as an important narrative about empathy—not only in middle school classrooms, but also from the White House to Hollywood and the courtrooms and hospitals in between.

Although students must enjoy *Mockingbird* enough for teachers to keep teaching it, all of the praise I've cited above comes from professional adults: teachers, librarians, lawyers, and doctors. Surprisingly, however, this positive attention does not come from literary critics, as many mention when writing about the novel.[51] In his opening to *Critical*

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[50] Stephen Lubet also rehearses this praise for Atticus, before making a hypothetical (what if Mayella was telling the truth?) critique character of this character: "[n]o real-life lawyer has done more for the self-image or public perception of the legal profession than the hero of Harper Lee's novel, To Kill a Mockingbird" (1339).

[51] How has *Mockingbird* claimed such a central role in the heart of the American imaginary? What is it about this particular novel that has arrested generations? On Vox's YouTube channel, "ephemera correspondent" Phil Edwards attributed *Mockingbrid*'s ascent "from hit to legend" to what the *New York Times* called in 1961 "the paperback revolution." *Mockingbird*, Edwards argued, became so widely taught because it was a "cheap, popular, respectable book." Although this media transition must have facilitated *Mockingbird*'s success, it doesn't answer the question: Why *this* novel? Critic and writer Naa Baako Ako-Adjei suggests that the novel's sentimentality seduces readers into reimagining our racial history. She writes,

Insights: To Kill A Mockingbird, Don Noble writes, "[t]his 1960 American novel is one of the most popular books of all time, but it has attracted relatively little critical commentary" (viii). Many dismiss the novel, in the words of Flannery O'Connor, as "a children's book,"[52] or point out that although the book is widely embraced in middle and high-school

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> *Mockingbird*'s immutable place on school curriculums rests, I think, on the fact that it gives voice to the collective and peculiar American delusion that racism in the United States wasn't really about the systemic use of terror, or the threat of terror on black people in order to maintain white supremacy, but that racism and racist violence, were perpetrated by a negligible number of Americans who were not dissimilar from Bob Ewell. (185)

While Ako-Adjei is right about the racial politics of *Mockingbird*, she misses both how Lee does this and why those strategies were successful. Lee's novel does render racism a "white trash" problem: Atticus explains to his children that "[o]ur stout Maycomb citizens aren't interested" in serving on juries because making such decisions might be bad for business, so Tom Robinson's jury was comprised of people like the Cunninghams, who Aunt Alexandra describes as "trash" (253, 256). Although Tom Robinson may be an "Uncle Tom" in the tradition of Stowe, *Mockingbird* does not work by inviting readers to feel overly-wrought pity on his behalf, but rather by asking us to fill-in what the child doesn't know. Lee perpetuates the delusion not through sentimentalism, but through carefully crafted cognitive transactions. Further, this "delusion" only works because *Mockingbird* taps a desire on the part of white people not to be racist or at least not be read as racist.

[52] Flannery O'Conner wrote this in a letter. I cited her from Carol Iannone's "Afterword" to "No Longer Black and White: A Forum on To Kill A Mockingbird."

classrooms, it is rarely taught at the college level.[53] But, a child-narrator does not a children's book make. And, it is precisely this narrator, Jean Louise Finch, who makes *Mockingbird* the American novel of the twentieth century. Literary criticism's dismissal of this little narrator as a sentimental tool or a marker of young adult literature has blinded us to a narrative strategy that is powerful enough to make readers want to stop, like Mr. Cunningham did, and at least consider questions of racism and prejudice. While many of the remarks above understand Atticus as the central avenue of *Mockingbird*'s moral advice (an important attachment I explored in the previous chapter), from a narrative perspective we can see that the novel's ethical work has as much or more to do with the way Lee positions us in relationship to her child-narrator. If we believe the publication lore about *Go Set A Watchman* (2015), we can see how Lee idealizes Atticus in *Mockingbird* in order to facilitate Scout's second coming of age in *Watchman*, where she learns she cannot take her father's moral guidance forever, but must, set her own moral compass, as in the bible passage to which the title alludes.[54] *Mockingbird* works not because of Atticus's actions, but because of

[53] Those that don't quote Flannery might point out that the novel is almost exclusively taught in middle- or high schools and rarely at the university level. John M. Gist writes, "[a]s a veteran university professor in humanities, I have never come across a colleague who assigned Mockingbird in a college—level literature course. In middle and high schools, however, it seems to serve as a coming-of-age story par excellence" (250). …might the not assigning also have to do with knowing students have already studied the book growing up?

[54] Lee originally submitted the *Watchman* manuscript to literary agent Annie Laurie Williams, in 1957. Both Williams and her husband Maurice Crain realized the potential of Lee's original draft and encouraged Lee to revise. With the help of her editor Tay Hohoff,

Scout's narration. A child-narrator creates various cognitive challenges on the individual and collective level that invite the reader to fill in a lot of what the child doesn't know. At the same time, however, child-narrators share with actual children the tendency to explain the world. In the hands of sophisticated writers, this balance of asking the reader to supplement the child's naivety and explaining certain aspects of the world in the voice of endearing innocence facilitates a shift in our imaginary.

Is it empathy that stops the lynch mob, as Atticus believes? Suzanne Keen defines empathy as "a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect, [which] can be provoked by witnessing another's emotional state, by hearing about another's condition, or even by reading" (4). Scout describes only a few emotions in this five-page encounter. When Scout first thrusts herself into the scene, living up to the military connotation of her name, she sees that "[a] flash of plain fear was going out of [Atticus's] eyes," but Scout doesn't adopt his affect as Keen's definition would require (172). Instead, she feels "[h]ot embarrassment" for "leap[ing] triumphantly into a ring of people I had never seen before" (172). I'd hazard that readers feel neither "plain fear" nor "[h]ot embarrassment;" we know that Scout narrates from a point in the future, having survived this scene, and we don't really care about the crowd judges our precocious narrator (172). Lee's scene seems closer to Lisa Zunshine's account of how Theory of Mind, which cognitive theorists link closely to empathy, works in

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Lee reworked the manuscript so that it focused on her protagonist's childhood. Historical evidence comes from The Washington Post's "To shill a mockingbird: How a manuscript's discovery became Harper Lee's 'new' novel" by Neely Tucker on 2/16/2015 and James B. Kelley's "Reading TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD and GO SET A WATCHMAN as Palimpsest" (2016).

fiction. Zunshine defines Theory of Mind or mindreading as "our ability to explain people's behavior in terms of their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and desires" (6). The almost universal prevalence of this ability allows us to determine, as Zunshine explains with her first example, that Peter Walsh's trembling hands can be "accounted for by his excitement at seeing his old love [Mrs. Dalloway] again after all these years and not, for instance, by his progressing Parkinson's disease" (3). This capability also makes possible the innumerable scenes in literature where "we automatically read a character's body language as indicative of his thoughts and feelings" (Zunshine 3). Through a series of instances like this, Zunshine argues that the primary reason we read literature is for the pleasure and practice of mindreading—of figuring out why those around us do what they do with their bodies. The metaphoric endorphins of this ToM workout kick in strongest, as Zunshine argues, when texts represent multiple layers of embeddedness: for instance, we reach the third level when we realize Scout doesn't know (1) that her father knows (2) that the men want to lynch Tom Robinson (3). As Zunshine points out, literature is the stuff of misreadings and this scene is no exception. Like Peter Walsh, Atticus's hands "tremble[e] a little" as he puts down the newspaper to extricate his children from the crowd of angry men (172). Just as we know that Peter Walsh is nervous to see Mrs. Dalloway again, readers easily infer that Atticus's hands shake because he is worried about his children.

Although Zunshine's account of mindreading allows us to trace the not-so-spontaneous way characters pick up on other's emotions, Theory of Mind doesn't fully account for the lynch mob's change of mind, either. As the collective desire of the mob suggests, fictional minds are not limited to the individual. In addition to using behaviors to intuit a single person's mental state, we also, and often in fiction, use the actions of a group

to infer a collective thinking or emotion. Alan Palmer uses the term "social minds" to describe this phenomenon; he explains "social minds … are public, embodied, and so available to each other without the need of speech" (2). In *Mockingbird*, the lynch mob constitutes what Palmer might call "*intermental thought*, which is joint, group, shared or collective thought, as opposed to intramental, or private individual thought" (2). Lee describes her mob as thinking and moving as one being both before and after Scout singles out the individual face she recognizes: "[i]n ones and twos, men got out of the cars. Shadows became substance as light revealed solid shapes moving toward the jail door" (171). The crowd's coordinated behavior, choreographed as it were by a single mind, indicates a single intention, a shared emotion. Although Scout picks the one face she recognizes to practice her pleasantries with, his change of heart determines the actions of the whole group. Like the eponymous town in *Middlemarch*, the novel which Palmer considers "the fulcrum around which the subject of [social minds] turns," Lee's Maycomb has a mind of its own (35). Scout recognizes that her town shares much collective thought and assumptions. Her narration is full of phrases like "people said," "according to neighborhood legend," "the neighborhood thought" etc. (9, 10, 13). The attribution of shared thought to the community resonates with the phrases Palmer draws our attention to in Eliot's opening: "was usually spoken of," "to close observers," "according to custom," etc. (68). Further, Palmer points out "there are several different Middlemarch minds…. Sometimes the town appears to be of one mind, but more often there are references to differences of view between the various social, geographical, and professional groups" (75). Maycomb too is made of multiple group minds, but Scout does not read them as separate at first. Scout's narration dialogues productively with Palmer's concept in two ways—first, as a character narrator, she can reflect on an

individual's role in and thoughts on the intermental units to which she belongs, and second, as a child-narrator, she can develop her own awareness of the intermental units that shape her community.

Palmer's concept of "social minds" brings us closer to understanding the lynch mob and helps us see that *Mockingbird* is not just about "climb[ing] into [an individual's] skin and walk[ing] around in it," but also about understanding the way communities fragment into social groups that can fall into stagnant patterns of thought. Lee dedicates much of *Mockingbird* to Scout's illustration of Maycomb's different social groups but makes it clear that one of Scout's major lessons is learning that these units *think* differently. On her first day of school, Scout distinguishes between "the bus delegation" and "the town people," but claims the same set of knowledge for both groups (22). Scout asserts that everyone, save the new teacher, knew why Walter Cunningham Junior didn't have a lunch. Scout says, "[i]t was clear enough to the rest of us: Walter Cunningham was sitting there lying his head off. He didn't forget his lunch, he didn't have any" (22). Even though Scout recognizes a difference between those from the country and those from the town, she assumes, correctly in this case, that they share some basic understandings that the single mind of their new teacher doesn't get. The group mind of Maycomb County faces the individual mind of the new teacher. For much of the novel, Scout makes the assumption that the Maycomb mind thinks and feels as one. Like this initial scene, she allows individuals their ignorance and peculiarities, but she doesn't see their beliefs and desires as conflicting in the way individuals can disagree or misunderstand. Scout explains that acknowledging these personal differences actually gives shape to the Maycomb mind:

> [T]the present generation of people who had lived side by side for years and years, were utterly predictable to one another: they took for granted attitudes, character shadings, even gestures, as having been repeated in each generation and refined by time. Thus the dicta No Crawford Minds His Own Business, Every Third Merriweather Is Morbid, The Truth Is Not in the Delafields, All the Bufords Walk Like That, were simply guides to daily living… (149)

Thus, the individual expression of family traits is actually part of the monolith of the Maycomb mind. Even those individuals as seemingly extreme in their actions as Dolphus Raymond take precautions to make sure they conform in appearances to the Maycomb mind. When Scout sees the fathers of "bus delegation" congregated in front of her father, she sees, as she did in school, a group in the face of an individual, but does not initially understand that this group of adults could think differently than her father.

The intermental unit of the lynch mob operates because Lee's readers understand the cultural narrative Scout does not. It's not just that we can infer someone's mental state based on their actions, as Zunshine asserts, or that we know minds can think as one, as Palmer attests, but we also know what they will think. Just as surely as Chekhov's pistol, placed on the wall in the first act, will fire by the last, the white cry of rape, in American fiction and too much of our history, will conjure a lynch mob. These stock stories, narrative structures that we all are familiar with, can be understood as what James Phelan calls "cultural narratives." He explains, "by a cultural narrative, I mean one that has a sufficiently wide circulation so that we can legitimately say that its author, rather than being a clearly identified individual, is a larger collective entity, perhaps a whole society or at least some significant subgroup of society" (8). Phelan's examples include "the story of the triumph of the individual over

hardship due to hard work and intelligence, and the story of the individual's corruption, the abandonment of worthy ideals in exchange for money, sex, or power—or some combination of the three" (8-9). Lee's novel takes up a particular cultural narrative that was widespread in the period between the Civil War and the Second World War. In 1892, anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells summarized this shared story succinctly as "the old thread bare lie that Negro men rape white women" (*Southern Horrors*). Through lynching, the ritualized murder and mutilation of Black men falsely accused of raping white women, white people not only convinced themselves of the delusion of white womanhood, but also maintained white supremacy. This cultural narrative of lynching is another key situation that bears out Gutiérrez Jones' argument that people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds "read[] race as well as racism differently" (1-2). Just as in the late 20th -century examples that Gutiérrez-Jones begins with such as the guilt of the police in the murder of Rodney King or Amadou Diallo, different groups have interpreted the mythical guilt of the Black rapist differently. Many Black people have understood the accusation all along as the "threadbare lie" Ida B. Wells called it. Although white people must have known, on some level, that the accusation of rape was a fantastic (in both the psychoanalytic and fictional sense) rationale for horrific violence that shored up white supremacy, white liberals didn't embrace the reality of the situation en masse until the early twentieth century. This fiction of violation and history of violence both precedes Lee's story and is so pervasive that she doesn't need to say much to allude to it. In fact, Lee does not even use the word "lynch" in the entire novel.

Lee published *Mockingbird* in the shadow of the lynching of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till and acquittal of his murderers, Roy Bryant and J. W. Milam. Patrick Chura notes the several intersections between *Mockingbird*'s plot and the series of events leading to

the lynching and the acquittal of the two white men who murdered him. As many have noted, Till's open-casket funeral and the brutality captured on film by *Jet* magazine gave important impetus to the civil rights movement. Lee's novel engages Till's lynching not only because the same cultural narrative condemned Tom Robinson, but also because Till's youth, like Scout's, proclaims his innocence and demands protection. Further, Lee sets *Mockingbird* in the 1930s a decade that began with the conviction of eight Black men, commonly known as the "Scottsboro Boys" of a rape that one of the "victims" later admitted didn't occur. The second half of the decade witnessed the publication of Margaret Mitchell's wildly popular novel *Gone With The Wind* (1936) and production of the film adaptation (1939). Both the novel and the film celebrate a midnight lynching, a scene I'll return to in the following chapter.

Scout's ignorance of this cultural narrative allows Lee to fracture this damaging sequence of events with the expectations of a child. Because Scout does not know what lynch mobs have done historically, she cannot comment on the glaring differences between the historical script and the story she narrates. Before her character's intervention, the child's voice alters the scene's tone creating an openness where readers can rework our own interpretive strategies. Instead of the angry shouts we might expect from a racist mob, Scout asks us to believe that "in obedience to my father, there followed what I later realized was a sickeningly comic aspect of an unfunny situation: the men talked in near-whispers" (171-172). The parental pact not to wake the sleeping baby seems both patronizing and inappropriate given the adult, awake Tom Robinson's awareness that he's the mob's intended target, a knowledge readers' share. The naivety of Scout's narration reorients the threat from the Black man's body to the child's innocence. Atticus's eyes flash with fear and his hands

tremble because he doesn't want his children to witness vigilante violence. In an over-aggressive agreement with Atticus's wish that his children would leave, the mob directs its energies towards Jem in an effort "to send him home" but also gives Atticus an opportunity to get his children in line (173). Because, as Ako-Adjei reminds us, children often participated in lynch mobs, both Scout's ignorance about what's going on and the mob's patience with Atticus's efforts "to make Jem mind him" are ahistorical (Lee 173). Even as this scene depends on readers filling in what Scout doesn't understand, the distance between the historic pattern and the fictional scene asks readers to shift how we read that narrative. Scout's ignorance of the cultural narrative allows Lee to build an openness into the scene that the fevered rush between accusation and vengeance forecloses in historical accounts. In the novel, Lee describes Scout as bursting into a "circle of light" between "the dark smelly bodies" of the lynch mob, who form a "semi-circle" around the Finches (172, 173). The film renders this distance vertically rather than horizontally by positioning Atticus on a porch in front of the jail. This physical, temporal, and factual space allows readers both to supplement Scout's narration with our knowledge of the historical context and to reconsider the strategies we use to interpret that narrative.

In place of the affective appeal of the illusion of the violated white women, Lee inserts presence and innocence of a little white girl. Neither Atticus nor the mob knows how to address Scout when behaves like a "little lady" (175). The only time Atticus speaks to her in the entire scene is to chastise her for her Tom-boyish gesture of kicking the man who grabbed Jem; he directs all his other communication and demands to Jem, whose masculine defiance matches his father's. Likewise the men in the mob offer neither response nor retaliation to her defensive kick. Her seemingly futile attempt at "livingroom talk" with Mr.

Cunningham render all the men including her father, brother, and Dill mute spectators (175). Scout describes her realization of their surprise:

> 'Entailments are bad,' I was advising [Mr. Cunningham], when I slowly awoke to the fact that I was addressing the entire aggregation. The men were all looking at me, some had their moths half-open. Atticus had stopped poking at Jem: they were standing together beside Dill. Their attention amounted to fascination. Atticus's mouth, even, was half-open, an attitude he had once described as uncouth. Our eyes met and he shut it. (174)

Scout's efforts to adopt the adult script of "polite conversation" with Mr. Cunningham and enact feminine intention "of mak[ing] him feel at home" silence the masculine posturing (174). When confronted with the presence of a child pretending to be a woman, the men lose sight of the pretense that they are protecting white femininity. The mob becomes captivated with Scout, looking at her with fascinated awe, instead of fixated on their original target held captive in the jail above. Their mouths hang half-open as if they could almost respond to Scout's everyday pleasantries in another situation. Atticus, at least, demonstrates this self-awareness when he makes eye contact with Scout and shuts his mouth in observance of an etiquette he'd previously imparted to his daughter.

Lee stops the lynch mob by putting the child's expectations in conflict with the demands of the lynch narrative. Scout's innocent efforts to assert a connection with Mr. Cunningham reveal that what had previously been interpreted as the requirement of a particular code of honor undermines the civility of their society. Scout chooses Mr. Cunningham because she recognizes him as part of her community, as part of a familiar family that she introduces in the second chapter as well-known for their honorable trait that

"they never took anything of anybody" (22). Scout begins by reminding Mr. Cunningham of his economic agreement with her father. At first, Mr. Cunningham cannot seem to hear the child's greeting in the racist noise of the mob mentality; instead, "the big man blinked and hooked his thumbs in his overall straps. He cleared his throat and looked away" (174). While Scout interprets his discomfort as the failure of her own "friendly overture," readers might interpret his avoidance of her eyes as shame: for having had needed Atticus's services, for paying him back in hickory nuts; and for having Scout know all about it. At the same time, readers aware of what Mr. Cunningham was planning to do might also interpret his shame as recognition the dissonance between the child's request for small talk and the adult's intent to murder, an acknowledgement of the incompatibility between civil discourse and racist spectacle and we can interpret his reluctance to meet her eyes as shame for being caught in the latter.

Unaware of the internal struggle behind what Scout later describes as Mr. Cunningham's "impassive" face, she presses on explaining that their social relationship not only stems from her father's involvement in his legal affairs but also from her family's hospitality to his son. Scout's implied analogy, 'you are to little Walter what Atticus is to me' moves Mr. Cunningham to recognition, "[h]e did know me, after all" (174). Scout's reference to little Walter may have reminded Mr. Cunningham that he has a smaller version of himself at home who he cares about, just as Atticus's miniatures interposed themselves to protect their father. Mr. Cunningham's "faint nod" is not just an acknowledgment of his paternity, but rather an affirmation that their society is comprised of many familial units where adults share a responsibility for the children (174). Just as Atticus shows hospitality to little Walter, Mr. Cunningham is moved to return Scout's civilities— not only to "not owe

her anything" but also to affirm which type of society he belongs to—one that models behavior for children not one that asserts fantasies through racist spectacle. Mr. Cunningham's final, simple response to Scout, "I'll tell him you said hey, little lady," acknowledges this parental responsibility and concludes the stand-off. Mr. Cunningham's epithet for Scout recalls the chivalric code that got them into the situation in the first place, but the diminutive "little" means that instead of protecting her virtue, he can protect her innocence. Having decided to be parents, the men can go home. Lee's scene brings to the fore a set of inferences that Lee's initial white readers, may have outsourced, as Morrison suggests through the shopkeeper, to an ocular mechanics. In the space between the child's failed mindreading and readers' understanding of the cultural narrative, Lee revises our interpretive strategies. By replacing the violated white woman's implied call for vengeance with the child's innocent attempts at conversation, Lee juxtaposes racist masculinity with social responsibility for other people's children.

Scout's questions did invite Mr. Cunningham to stand in Atticus's shoes for a minute, and Lee's scene renders good parenting as protecting little white children from knowledge of racist violence. But what about children of color? The importance of the lynching of Emmett Till in the historical moment of *Mockingbird*'s publication meant that Black children were on the nation's mind even if they were not the subjects of Lee's novel. Further, both the novel and the lynching followed the *Brown v Board of Education* (1954) decision that sought to place Black and white children in the same classroom. While mixing the children of "country folk" with those of "professional people" is as close as Lee gets to school integration, that question which some related, in a Freudian leap, to miscegenation, creates

the central historical context of the novel's publication (23).[55] The film version of *Mockingbird* alludes to the hope of integration more directly through a brief scene of potential friendship between Jem and an unnamed child who we might assume is Tom Robinson's son because he's playing outside the Robinson house when Atticus first visits.

Figure 3: *To Kill A Mockingbird* 1962: 45:24-46:20

[55] Scout's Uncle Jack criticizes the illogic of this connection in *Go Set a Watchman*: "[t]here's nothing under the sun that says because you go to school with one Negro, or go to school with them in droves, you'll want to marry one" (270).

While Atticus is inside and with Scout asleep on the front seat, the unknown child slowly approaches Jem; they exchange waves; and Jem gives a small smile to his potential friend. The lawyer's actions—both Atticus's defense of Tom Robinson and Thurgood Marshall's team in *Brown*— make possible interracial friendship among children. But before the children have an opportunity to speak, Mr. Ewell stumbles onto the scene, a threat framed by both the camera and the windshield. Mr. Ewell is the fear of miscegenation incarnate because, as we learn through Atticus's cross examination, he abused Mayella into accusing Tom when, in fact, she had both invited Tom inside and attempted to seduce him. This fear, figured in the novel and the film as drunk and disgusting, forecloses this friendship as Jem's first words ask for help rather than introduction.

Part of the reason *To Kill A Mockingbird* has become such an important novel to the imagined community of the United States is because it deals with that "thing," that national wrong, that continues to plague our communities and trouble our psyches. Even as Lee positions Atticus, Jem, and Scout as models for how we might move forward from this sordid violence, her novel makes serious shifts in the way we understand the tradition of lynching once called "rough justice." In "The Interpretation of Dreams" Freud notes that *Hamlet* "is rooted in the same soil as Oedipus Rex," but while Sophocles's tragedy "[brings] to life" the cultural fantasy of the oedipal complex, Shakespeare's play represses the same proclivity for incest and fratricide so that "we learn of its existence-- as we discover the relevant facts in a neurosis-- only through the inhibitory effects which proceed from it" (31). Along the same lines, *To Kill A Mockingbird* raises and represses, or raises through repression, some of America's darkest— or, to be more accurate— whitest demons. The eerie intersection of race and gender in the ritual of lynching is most clearly exposed in Jean Toomer's poem

"Portrait in Georgia." Toomer's careful catalogue of a southern belle slides into a description of a Black corpse mutilated through the ritualized violence of lynching:

> Hair--braided chestnut,
>
> coiled like a lyncher's rope,
>
> Eyes--fagots,
>
> Lips--old scars, or the first red blisters,
>
> Breath--the last sweet scent of cane,
>
> And her slim body, white as the ash
>
> of black flesh after flame.

Like an optical illusion, Toomer's poem renders the features of a white lady as the very tools and evidence of violence that made them significant. The constructed ideal of femininity it seems depends on mob violence focused on Black bodies. While Lee raises the foundational violence towards Native people and represses it in the same breath "If General Jackson hadn't run the Creeks up the creek," she sustains her not-so-critical engagement with the national neurosis of lynching, so that her subtle choices have serious consequences for the popular imaginary (3). *To Kill A Mockingbird* finalized the fissure in the white inter-class solidarity that made lynching possible for so long, but also sublimated this extralegal violence into the hands of the police.

Mockingbird's central role in our national imaginary stems in large part from the way it helped white people rework how we read racist cultural narratives and rethink what role we want to play in them. In this way, *Mockingbird*, is the clearest example of a societal version of what midcentury psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott proposed as a "transitional object." As we saw in the previous chapter, some infants attach to a special object such as a teddy bear or

blanket in order to deal with separation from their parents. The "transitional object" works because parents become aware of the objects significance and go to great lengths to maintain the fantasy. Winnicott postulates that "when we witness the infant's employment of a transitional object, the first not-me possession, we are witnessing both the child's first use of symbol and first experience of play" (130).[56] Winnicott calls the space where this rich interchange between reality and fantasy occurs the potential space and postulates that this is the space of cultural experience.[57] So just as a child might reach for a blanket out of fear of

[56] Bowlby, who like Winnicott, spent much time considering infants' relationships with their mothers also observed attachment to objects like teddy bears and blankets. Unlike Winnicott, however, he does not believe that this behavior plays a large role in the development of symbolic thought. Bowlby writes, "[a] much more parsimonious way of looking at the role of these inanimate objects is to regard them simply as objects towards which certain components of attachment behavior come to be directed or redirected because the 'natural' object is unavailable…. Since, pending more evidence, there is no reason to suppose that so-called transitional objects play any special role in a child's development, cognitive or other, a more appropriate term for them would be simply 'substitute objects.'" (312).

[57] Psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas thinks more specifically about how an aesthetic experience may emerge from a person's primary relationship with his mother. He argues that "[t]he mother's idiom of care and the infant's experience of this handling is the first human aesthetic" (41). Bollas believes that the mother equips her child with two primary transformations; first, she transforms her child from a state of hunger to a state of satiety, and second, she shares language, and, as Bollas writes, "[w]ith the word, the infant has found a

separation, a society might reach for a story out of shame for our history, hope for transformation, and even fear for our privilege. But adults are different than children, and the collectivity that comprises a nation is different than the pair that constitutes the mother child partnership, and this is why *Mockingbird* works. Some works of art do feel like they are transforming us, or at least, I believe we seek them out because we want them to. As we saw in the first section, the voice of a child allows readers to fill in not only the adult mental states that Scout misses, but also the complicated cultural narratives that she doesn't understand. Lee, who avoids the word "lynch," allows readers to supplement Scout's innocence with what of our collective guilt we're willing to admit.

THE BLUEST EYE

> I had only one desire: to dismember it. To see of what it was made, to discover the dearness, to find the beauty, the desirability that had escaped me, but apparently only me. Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs—all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured. "Here," they said, "this is beautiful, and if you are on this day 'worthy' you may have it." … I could not

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new transformational object, which facilitates the transition from deep enigmatic privacy toward the culture of the human village" (43). The first transformational experiences shaped in the mother and child "rapport," give form to future aesthetic experiences, they do not determine them. Bollas explains, "the ego has internalized not simply an object (the mother) but a process (her aesthetic transformation,) and this process is a paradigm of subject relating to an object that transforms the subject's being" (44). We seek aesthetic experiences, to some extent, because we want to transform our ego.

> love it. But I could examine it to see what it was all the world said was lovable. Break off the tiny fingers, bend the flat feet, loosen the hair, twist the head around, and the thing made one sound—a sound they said that was the sweet and plaintive cry "Mama," but which sounded to me like the bleat of a dying lamb, or, more precisely, our icebox door opening on rusty hinges in July. Remove the cold and stupid eyeball, it would bleat still, "Ahhhhhh," take off the head, shake out the sawdust, crack the back against the brass bed rail, it would bleat still. The gauze back would split, and I could see the disk with six holes, the secret of the sound. A mere metal roundness.
>
> — Claudia MacTeer *The Bluest Eye* (20-21)

Morrison steeps *The Bluest Eye* (1970) in a different, sadder knowledge about dolls than Winnicott's ideas of the "transitional object." Morrison knows that children don't attach to particular toys solely out of a desire to deal with separation, but that the particularity and significance of those toys is already determined by their parents and society. By choosing nine-year-old Claudia MacTeer to deliver a brief exposition on "blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll[s]," Morrison reminds us that children know the lessons that their parents forgot they buried in the toy-gifts. Claudia knows that the gift of the doll simultaneously rewards her "worth[iness]" and establishes a standard of "dearness," "beauty," "desirability," "lov[ability]." This seemingly arbitrary standard baffles and bewilders the child. Far from inspiring physical affection, in Claudia's experience, the doll causes physical pain and discomfort. When she tries to sleep with it like the little girls in picture books, the doll's "unyielding limbs resisted my flesh—the tapered fingertips on those dimpled hands scratched… the bone-cold head collided with my own" (20). Morrison's description alludes

to narratives the child doesn't know—the doll's unyielding limbs allude to the protected feminine in the myth that *Mockingbird* rewrites; the scratching hands and the hard, cold head gesture towards the unconscious, unadmitted violence that that chastity requires. Claudia, whose parents beat her, cannot understand how the adults hear the doll's complaining cry "Mama" as "sweet and plaintive," how the death croak of a lamb or creak of the ice-box could invite such care. While the child does not understand the myths to which she alludes, she does know that the doll irritates her own flesh, annoys her own head. She also knows that the adults' commitment to the dolls belies this lived experience. In a catalogue that categorizes "adults" and "older girls" alongside "shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs," Claudia explains how "all the world" sets aside this physical discomfort to love and value the dolls.

The young girl that Morrison chooses to narrate most of *The Bluest Eye* dismembers the doll to find out what it is about the doll that invites "the unfulfilled longing" of all around her (21). While readers rely on Claudia to explain what it feels like to be told she should love and adore a cold hard piece of plastic, at the same time we see what the child cannot. The child does not attribute her violence-laced curiosity to the way her body diverges from the cold standard set by blonde baby dolls. While Morrison makes this devaluation apparent by her choice of narrator, the child attributes her curiosity to an interest in what attracts adult and societal desire and attention. In this way, Morrison exposes a damaging value system contained in the seeming innocuous dolls without making her child-narrator participate in it. Claudia's indignation is born of a self-worth that the very imagery Morrison uses her to critique seeks to extinguish.

As Anne Anlin Cheng traces in the introduction to *The Melancholy of Race*, by focusing on dolls, Morrison alludes to the "now famous 'doll tests'" conducted by social psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark. Cheng explains that in those experiments, "[i]n interview after interview, when given the choice, the majority of the African American children, including three-year-olds, found the brown dolls to be 'bad' and preferred instead to play with the 'good,' white dolls" (ix). While the Clarks demonstrated the early development of internalized racism, Morrison's Claudia MacTeer narrates the moment before adopting the skewed social standard that her older sister and Pecola already embrace. While Frieda and Pecola have "a loving conversation about how "cu-ute Shirley Temple was," Claudia, like the psychologists, can see how ethical standards of good and bad get coded into visual of white features (19). These "doll tests" became "famous" not only because they present such clear psychological evidence for the double-standard the U.S. is founded on, but also because Thurgood Marshall incorporated it into his argument in *Brown v Board of Education* (1954). The evidence that Marshall used to dismantle segregation becomes a literary trope that Morrison uses to expose the way a racialized value system still structures society. She published the novel in 1970, after the decade celebrated for civil rights and set her novel in 1941 when the U.S. entered WWII. Notably, the novel's setting and publication frame the *Brown* decision by thirteen years on one side and seventeen on the other. While Morrison's novel dialogues with this important case, it takes as its subject a skewed value system that both undergirded segregation and survived its formal dismantling. In the 1940s Ohio where Morrison sets her novel, Claudia does not live in a segregated neighborhood (the novel begins with the MacTeer sisters white "next-door friend," Rosemary Villanucci) and the sisters do not attend a segregated school (9). Instead, Morrison emphasizes the racialized

value system that made segregation possible. Mrs. MacTeer believes Rosemary when she accuses the sisters of "playing nasty" with Pecola, and even though the girls attend an integrated school, "white girls didn't suck their teeth when [Maureen Peal, a light-skinned classmate] was assigned to be their work partners" (30, 62).

Importantly, Claudia does not internalize the value-system she exposes to us, but instead identifies it as a misalignment of adult love and attention. Claudia knows that her parents give her the doll out of love for her: "I knew that the doll represented what they thought was my fondest wish" (20). Through the reciprocal framing of intention, Morrison emphasizes the way racism infiltrates individual attachments. Claudia's parents give her the gift because they think she wants it and she is curious about the doll because she wants to understand what they see and value in the doll.[58] Further, even as Claudia understands the doll invites play mothering, she introduces her exposition on the dolls through a jealousy not only of maternal but also of paternal attention. She begins with her hatred of Shirley Temple; Claudia "hated Shirley. Not because she was cute, but because she danced with Bojangles, who was *my* friend, *my* uncle, *my* daddy, and who ought to have been soft-shoeing it and chuckling with me" (19). Claudia's anger towards Shirley and her violence towards dolls (and little white girls) doesn't have as much to do with their essence—their cuteness, or beauty, or color—but rather with the attention they attract from adults, especially adults like the famous dancer Bojangles and her parents who should be playing with her. Attention, for

[58] See Bernstein's discussion of the doll tests for a discussion of how dolls can create what she calls "scriptive behavior" in *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights*.

Claudia, means engagement in play—dancing and laughing, recognition of attachment—whether that's an uncle or a father, and possession, hers alone.

This desire for appropriate paternal attention not only triggers her tangent on the dolls but also comprises her proposed alternative. If anyone had asked Claudia what she would like for Christmas, she would have "spoken up, 'I want to sit on the low stool in Big Mama's kitchen with my lap full of lilacs and listen to Big Papa play his violin for me alone'" (22). Just as she imagines Bojangles dancing with her, she yearns for her grandfather to play for her alone. While Claudia's wish is balanced in terms of genders and sensory perception, it's telling that Morrison makes a space for male music. Before the end of the chapter, we will learn how Claudia already enjoys her mother's singing, which not only stands as a necessary reprieve after Mrs. MacTeer's "fussing soliloquies" but also makes deep sadness bearable (24). Claudia describes the magical power of her mother's song: "[m]isery colored by the greens and blues in my mother's voice took all of the grief out of the words and left me with a conviction that pain was not only endurable, it was sweet" (26). Although Mr. MacTeer plays the part of a good father in providing shelter (in "Winter," Claudia describes him as "[a] Vulcan guarding the flames, he gives us instructions about which doors to keep closed or opened for proper distribution of heat, lays kindling by, discusses qualities of coal, and teaches us how to rake, feed and bank the fire") and protection (he chases away Mr. Henry when he molests Frieda), Claudia never describes him as playing with or for his children (61). Later, Claudia makes the connection clear: "[d]olls we could destroy, but we could not destroy the honey voices of parents" and other adults that somewhere on the edge of their consciousness privilege white children over Black children (74).

By braiding Claudia's chapters with omniscient sections that wend their way to Pecola, Morrison juxtaposes the child who has good enough self-love to hate the baby dolls, with the child who doesn't. Pecola is too abused emotionally and physically to reject the white standard. Instead, she convinces herself that "if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different…. If she looked different, beautiful, maybe Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too." (46). This omniscient account of Pecola's thought uses the same names for the parents that the child has been trained to do. In place of Claudia's "Daddy" and "Mama," Pecola calls her own parents by the names their known for in the community—Cholly and Mrs. Breedlove. Forced to witness her parents abuse each other, the child feels herself responsible and imagines that if she were different, her parents would behave better. In her sections, Claudia witnesses the way Pecola internalizes the violence that surrounds her. When Maureen Peal, their fair-skinned classmate, teases Pecola, Claudia describes her friend as "fold[ing] into herself, like a pleated wing. Her pain antagonized me. I wanted to open her up, crisp her edges, ram a stick down that hunched and curving spine, force her to stand erect and spit the misery out on the streets. But she held it in where it could lap up into her eyes" (73-74). Unlike the too-hard doll, Claudia's friend is not hard enough; like a rag-doll she crumbles into the abuse.[59] Adult readers can see that Claudia's self-worth not only does not tolerate false standards of beauty,

[59] In *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (2010), Robin Bernstein details how the physical construction of dolls, combined with the people they were supposed to represent, dictated how children would play with them. Hard fragile white dolls required careful, tender play and admiration while rag dolls, often adorned with exaggerated features of blackface minstrelsy, withstood rough play.

but also the internalization of that hatred. It angers Claudia that Pecola cannot "spit the misery out," but instead buries that sadness inside of herself causing her to crumple into herself like a folded wing. The child who Morrison allows to narrate has enough self-worth to share with readers' unclouded observations of society's skewed standards while the omniscient narrator illustrates how that value system can crush other children.

Morrison demonstrates how children intuit this power structure even if they are not as aware of it as Claudia is. In "Winter," in addition to introducing the light-skinned Maureen Peal, who both teachers and other students seem to prefer, Claudia describes a group of boys taunting Pecola, "Black e mo. Black e mo. Yadaddsleepnekked. Black e mo black e mo ya dadd sleeps necked. Black e mo" (65). While the spelling indicates the dialect the boys use to torment Pecola, it also recalls the creative punctuation Morrison uses with the Dick and Jane primer, drawing attention to the many ways that false ideal gets inscribed. Morrison's argument becomes more complicated as Claudia, in her more mature voice, comments on how the boys devised a taunt based on their own insecurities and inferences about their target's weakness:

> They had extemporized a verse made up of two insults about matters over which the victim had no control: the color of her skin and speculations on the sleeping habits of an adult, wildly fitting in its incoherence. That they themselves were black, or that their own father had similarly relaxed habits was irrelevant. It was their contempt for their own blackness that gave them the first insult its teeth. They seemed to have taken all of their smoothly cultivated ignorance, their exquisitely learned self-hatred, their elaborately designed hopelessness and sucked it all up into a fiery cone of scorn that had

> burned for ages in the hollows of their minds—cooled—and spilled over lips of outrage, consuming whatever was in its path. They danced a macabre ballet around the victim, whom, for their own sake, they were prepared to sacrifice to the flaming pit. (65)

Claudia's insight into her classmates' minds demonstrates that boys also internalize the double standard taught to her through dolls. Morrison's choice of adverbs "exquisitely" and "elaborately" indicate that this almost-inescapable "self-hatred" gets learned through complicated, but all-encompassing mechanisms. Like Claudia who did not initially stomach the world's preference for white girls, her male peers stored up their loathing until they found a weaker person to project it onto. Frieda's sister "with set lips and Mama's eyes" demonstrates the confidence that may be a product of their raising or inheritance puts an end to the teasing by hitting one of the boys over the head with her schoolbooks (66). Claudia shares her sister's indignation but directs her anger at Maureen Peal, who after a brief bout of feigned friendship begins interrogating Pecola on whether she had actually seen a naked man and why she associates naked men with her father. Claudia admits, "I was glad to have a chance to show anger. Not only because of the ice cream, but because we had seen our own father naked and didn't care to be reminded of it and feel the shame brought on by the absence of shame" (72). Claudia's self-reflection echoes what her older-voice had already observed—the shape this teasing takes renders what's normal, being Black or accidentally glimpsing one's naked father on the way to the bathroom, abnormal and shameful. Both, as Claudia asserts, are not only outside of the victim's control and also are not bad. Instead, in this section Morrison demonstrates how racial hierarchies inform playground bullying and foreshadows how easily normal paternal relationships can become perverted.

The Bluest Eye demonstrates how blackness gets rendered as wrong through the racist value system that structures society by connecting these standards to the incest taboo. In the "Afterword," Morrison explains that "[i]n trying to dramatize the devastation that even casual racial contempt can cause, I chose a unique situation, not a representative one. The extremity of Pecola's case stemmed largely from a crippled and crippling family—unlike the average Black family and unlike the narrator's" (210). By sharing the details of Pecola's rape in the omniscient sections that follow Claudia's confident chapters, Morrison invites readers to read Cholly's aggression through the child-narrator's naïve insights. On her first page, Claudia warns readers that "Pecola was having her father's baby," but interprets that evidence of rape and incest as failure of cultivation: "there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941" (5). After three seasons of Claudia explaining in her no-nonsense-nine-year-old way about the double standards that privilege white dolls and light-skinned girls over her and her sister, Morrison provides Cholly's backstory in a section called:

> SEEFATHERHEISBIGANDSTRONGFATH
>
> ERWILLYOUPLAYWITHJANEFATHER
>
> ISSMILINGSMILEFATHERSMILESMILE (132)

The way Morrison collapses her version of the Dick and Jane primer into all caps unspaced lines already hints at a perversion of the desire for paternal attention that Claudia expressed in "Autumn." As Cholly's youth unfolds in the voice of the omniscient narrator, it becomes clear that the value system Morrison exposes is not only about a preference for signs of white beauty but also about the way white hatred can get channeled onto the bodies of Black women and girls. Morrison describes how white hunters pervert Cholly's first sexual experience into a gross spectacle for their racist ridicule. Because of the racialized power

structure and the firearms of the white hunters, Cholly cannot stand up for himself and protect his partner. Instead, the narrator explains:

> They were big, white, armed men. He was small, black, helpless. His subconscious knew what his conscious mind did not guess—that hating them would have consumed him, burned him up like a piece of soft coal, leaving only flakes of ash and a question mark of smoke. He was, in time, to discover that hatred of white men—but not now. Not in impotence, but later, when the hatred could find sweet expression. For now, he hated the one who had created the situation, the one who bore witness to his failure, his impotence. The one whom he had not been able to protect, to spare, to cover from the round moon glow of the flashlight. (151)

In this description, Morrison explains why Cholly was unable to direct his hatred at the white men who demeaned him. Morrison's decision to describe embracing this hate as death by fire recalls both Claudia's classmates' taunts and the ritualized torture of lynching. Instead of doing anything that may cost him his life, Cholly turns to the women beneath him and misdirects his hate towards her. His innocent attraction to a girl his own age created an opportunity for white men to supplement their sport of hunting with another kind of violence. Although Darlene covered her face in shame, Cholly believes she witnessed his emasculation and blames him for his failure to protect her. In this scene, the white men's perverted gaze and potential violence constitute "rape," as Morrison categorizes the violation Cholly and Darlene. Morrison explains in her "Afterword" that she intended to "connect[] Cholly's 'rape' by the whitemen to his own of his daughter. The most masculine act of aggression

becomes feminized in my language, 'passive,' and, I think, more accurately repellent when deprived of the male 'glamour of shame' rape is (or once was) routinely given" (215).

Morrison asks readers to hold Cholly's violation alongside that of his daughter by inviting us to read his story with sympathy even as we remain committed to the condemnation born of Claudia's commentary. Although Claudia describes a desire for maternal affection and paternal play, she has enough love from her parents to equip her with enough self-worth to see the misalignment of attention demonstrated by the dolls. Cholly, on the other hand, receives only refusal from his father and mother. Cholly's unnamed single mother abandons the infant Cholly "on a junk heap by the railroad," and when he tracks down a person he believes to be his father fourteen years later, the man rejects him cruelly "[g]et the fuck outta my face!" (132, 156). This repeated parental rejection causes Cholly to regress to infancy: the fourteen-year-old "soiled himself like a baby" (157). When the teenager collects himself to escape the public street, he crouches under a pier: "[h]e remained knotted there in fetal position, paralyzed, his first covering his eyes, for a long time. No sound, no sight, only darkness and heat and the press of his knuckles on his eyelids. He even forgot his messed-up trousers" (157). The father's refusal causes the young man to crumple into his infant self. The "SEEFATHER" section plays out what Claudia couldn't say in her exposition on dolls; while the child critiqued the misalignment of adult love to white dolls and girls, the omniscient narrator describes a Black child raised without love. Where Claudia lashes out in the face of rejection through violence towards dolls and anger towards Maureen Peal, Cholly reverts to childhood. Where Claudia understands the value system that cause others to treat her and her sister differently, Cholly turns his anger on Black women. As Morrison writes in the paragraphs that conclude Cholly's childhood and transition to the rape

of Pecola, "[h]aving no idea of how to raise children, and having never watched any parent raise himself, he could not even comprehend what such a relationship should be" (160). Because of the careful way Morrison describes Cholly's childhood in relation to Claudia's insights, his aggression can be understood to stand for a social perversion in addition to an individual one.

The horror that Morrison's novel speaks is not only the societal forces that pressure these children into shattering like Pecola or "pay[ing] very good attention to ourselves," as Claudia categorizes her and Frieda's strategy of mothering each other, but also the particular crime of incest of the most inappropriate paternal attention (190). The image of Pecola's dead child completes the comparison implied in Claudia's curiosity about white baby dolls. At the end of the novel, a more mature Claudia understands the juxtaposition that Morrison has been inviting readers to fill in throughout the novel. Claudia describes Pecola's child:

> I thought about the baby that everybody wanted dead, and saw it very clearly. It was in a dark, wet place, its head covered with great O's of wool, the black face holding, like nickels, two clean black eyes, the flared nose, kissing-thick lips, and the living, breathing silk of black skin. No synthetic yellow bands suspended over marble-blue eyes, no pinched nose and bowline mouth. More strongly than my fondness for Pecola, I felt a need for someone to want the black baby to live—just to counteract the universal love of white baby dolls, Shirley Temples, and Maureen Peals. (190)

Claudia imagines Pecola's child as lovable and touchable in a way that white dolls are not. In place of the doll's "bone-cold head" and fake flat hair, Claudia sees a cushion of thick curly wool (20). In place of the hard hands that scratch, Claudia can feel the soft and smooth

aliveness of Black skin. In place of a mouth pursed like a weapon, Claudia describes kiss-inviting lips. This imagined child's nose even opens itself to the world in ways foreclosed by the scrunched up almost sneer of the white doll. For Claudia and her sister, the problem is the misalignment of "universal love," the acute awareness that the world prefers white plastic and the girls that represents to the real lives of Black babies (190). Claudia explains, "[W] e did not dwell on the fact that the baby's father was Pecola's father too; the process of having a baby by any male was incomprehensible to us—at least she knew her father. We thought only of the overwhelming hatred for the unborn baby" (191). In their naivety about where babies come from, Claudia and Pecola overlook the individual crime—the father's act of incestuous rape— at the expense of the social sin—the conceptual annihilation of Black children. By braiding these two wrongs together, Morrison trains her readers to see the way the racist value system both enables the father's violence and causes harm far beyond the individual victim of that crime.

THE ROUND HOUSE

> Violently raped, I thought. I knew those words fit together. Probably from some court case I'd read in my father's books or from a newspaper article of the cherished paperback thrillers my uncle, Whitey, kept on his handmade bookshelf.
>
> —Joe Coutts *The Round House* (15)

Just as Claudia does not understand the incest her friend endured, thirteen-year-old Joe Coutts, narrator and protagonist of Louise Erdrich's 2012 *The Round House* cannot register the awful crime that his mother survives before the novel opens. When he attempts to discuss it with his Aunt Clemence, he understands on an intellectual level what he cannot on an emotional one. Despite his familiarity with case history, with current events, and even

with fiction, Joe cannot fully know what his mother endured or why, as he poignantly asks his aunt, "did she smell like gas?" (15). Joe cannot think-feel the truth of the attacker's aggression until the ceremonial place that gives the novel its name speaks it to him—in his mother's voice. As readers use Joe's words to "fit together" the story of what happened to his mother, we fill in what we don't want children to know: that men rape women; that this is a violent strategy of domination, not only of one sex over another, but also of one nation, as Erdrich's novel foregrounds, over another; that this aggression enacts a desire to annihilate so deep it can also manifest in an attempt to immolate another person. At the same time, through our reliance on Joe not only for plot details but also for clues about what will be important, readers develop, along with the child, particular interpretative strategies that put us on alert us to what the U.S. law will fail to see and attune us to ways of knowing that are illegible to western discourse. First, through the painstaking and devastated attempts of Joe's father, the tribal judge, to bring the rapist to trial, Erdrich exposes the way the U.S. legal system renders tribal lands into hunting grounds of sexual predators like her novel's villain Linden Lark. As she chronicles the "rotten casserole" of Indian Law, Erdrich's novel not only claims a place next to the legal tomes on Joe's father's bookshelf but also raises awareness about an actual epidemic of violence against Native women that newspapers have been remiss in reporting. Erdrich capitalizes on the suspense strategies more at home among Whitey's thrillers to involve readers in a revenge plot necessitated by the law's failure. Even as Erdrich capitalizes on these black and white strategies—the letter of the law, tangible evidence, and the imperative for vengeance— she reveals the way these hard facts both determine and limit what the courts will see. Through Joe's juvenile detective work and

naïve faith in the law, Erdrich educates her readers on the narrow and limited way courts see rape cases, especially on reservations.

Just as Lee and Morrison did before her, Erdrich positions Joe with a child's innocence and an adult's knowledge, which both invites readers to fill in what a child cannot register and asks us to trust what the adult has learned. We know that Joe narrates "at a removal of time, from that summer in 1988, when my mother refused to come down the stairs" (142). Erdrich establishes this distance from the beginning: as the young Joe sits weeding at his parents' house, the narrator offers an adult commentary on his own dedication: "[y]ou would think then that I would have stopped, a thirteen-year-old boy with better things to do, but on the contrary" (Erdrich 2). Later in the paragraph, the narrator again acknowledges his distance from his younger self, "[e]ven now, I wonder at the steepness of my focus" (Erdrich 2). These assertions that he is no longer thirteen serve to connect readers to the older Joe narrator; "you would think" commands readers to admire his younger self and "[e]ven now, I wonder" acknowledges the adult Joe's role as the intermediary between the book's readers and the vulnerable thirteen-year-old. While the narration is dedicated, for the most part, to the voice, perspective, and vocabulary of the thirteen-year-old Joe, the periodic commentary of the adult narrator lets the reader know that Joe survives to become a lawyer, a public prosecutor, and, like his father, a tribal judge. Joe's adult profession positions him to draw reader's attention to the important legal cases that prevent the family from bringing the rapist to trial. As in a traditional suspense plot, the first half of *The Round House* investigates the pre-novel crime—how we come to know what happened—and the second half concentrates on bringing the culprit to justice—how we read what happened. These two halves frame Geraldine's testimony, which Erdrich places at the

exact midpoint of her novel. For the majority of *The Round House*, we rely on Joe, the child-narrator, to report the central events of the plot. Because he's only recently become a teenager, "[t]wo weeks ago, I'd been twelve," he often "underinterprets" events to use James Phelan's term for a particular type of unreliability that occurs when "the narrator's lack of knowledge, perceptiveness, or sophistication yields an insufficient interpretation of an event, character, or situation" (3, 52). Joe's naivety foregrounds questions of interpretation—we're not so concerned with what happened, as mature readers we can infer the awful extent of the rape from the first pages, but with how Joe comes to know it and how he has to read it.

Joe's initial discovery of the off-stage crime that opens *The Round House* demonstrates the poignant power that child-narrators afford. Although the child's innocence prevents Joe from fully interpreting what his mother survived, his narration reliably reports and evaluates the sequence of events. After the ominous search for his missing mother, Geraldine returns home on her own, and in an almost-matter-of-fact tone, Joe reports, "[t]here was vomit down the front of her dress and, soaking her skirt and soaking the gray cloth of the car seat, her dark blood" (7). The repetition of soaking framed by vomit and blood speaks to the severity of the assault and to the child's horror at his mother's injury. While Joe's simple description gives readers enough evidence to infer that his mother just survived a rape, the son hesitates before making that interpretation himself. Even as an adult looking backward, Joe avoids the word 'rape' until his younger self determines its relevance and asks about the violation by name. In Phelan's taxonomy of unreliability Joe's spare narration would be considered "underreading." In that initial scene, Joe also reliably reports, but underreads the "strong smell [that] rose from her, the vomit and something else, like gas or kerosene," but cannot interpret this as evidence of attempted immolation (7). As we saw

in the last chapter, neither Joe's aunt nor his father can explain this violence to him—as if in unspoken agreement to protect the child from the very thought that a person would want to immolate another. Even though Joe cannot reliably interpret the awful extent of what his mother survived, his ethical evaluation matches that of the adult characters. Without naming the attacker's offenses, he registers their wrongness; as he puts it: "I wanted to know that whoever had attacked my mother would be found, punished, and killed" (12). Joe's ethical assessment does not only involve imagined retribution for the perpetrator, but also a revision of his own behavior. Before he can bring himself to name the aggression that so injured his mother, he knows he should refuse his father's plan to drop him off before taking her to the hospital. Although his aunt cannot explain to him why his mother smelled like gas, he knew, from her reaction, not "to ask her about the gasoline again" (15). Because Joe's mother will not recount what happened to her until she ensures the safety of another woman's child and because Joe's father tries half-heartedly not to involve him in the case, Joe and his friends take it upon themselves to solve the crime.

Erdrich's decision to narrate the rape as a gradual realization of survivor's son has several important repercussions. First, because Joe reliably reports but underinterprets the evidence of the crime, a general understanding of sequence of events becomes the readers' responsibility—any errors in that interpretation become an error in reading not in reporting. This forecloses many of the inappropriate questions that too often come up around sex crimes such as "was it rape?" or "was she asking for it?" Because readers' fill in the crime that the child cannot narrate, we *know* what happened to Geraldine. Erdrich makes us so sure of what happened so she can focus on how we read it. Second, by choosing the son rather than the survivor to narrate, Erdrich does not put Geraldine in a position where she has to testify—

determining what happened becomes Joe's burden and our responsibility. In other words, Erdrich does not ask us to try to know or appropriate Geraldine's trauma. Instead, she asks us to understand how traumatic experiences influence an entire family and community and to know the violence that caused it. Third, because we piece together crime before we know the attacker's identity our assessment of his guilt and malice is not influenced by preconceived assumptions. Finally, because we already know in a general sense what happened, Erdrich can focus our attention more clearly on the questions of the father—the legal issues of how to bring the perpetrator to justice.

At the time Erdrich wrote *The Round House* and when she published it in 2012, tribal courts could not try white men who raped Native women on tribal land. *The Round House* intervenes on behalf of Native women, 1 in 3 of whom are raped, and seeks to close the legal loophole that distinguishes crimes by race on tribal lands (Erdrich 319). Less than a year after Erdrich published *The Round House*, congress renewed the Violence Against Women Act. Because of lobbying efforts by tribal and other groups—and because of Erdrich's prose—congress included a provision that allows tribal courts to try non-natives for some sex crimes. Although this measure does not end the sexual violence pervasive on tribal lands, as Erdrich argues in her *New York Times* opinion, "Rape on the Reservation," the provision does offer what Erdrich considers "a slim margin of hope for justice." The refusal of U.S. law to exact justice in cases of sexual violence on reservations is not just a fictional conflict. Erdrich's narrative makes clear that the conflict lies not in the fictional world of the novel but in the case-lawed "maze of injustice"[60] that prevents Native women and tribal courts from

[60] "Maze of Injustice" is the title of an Amnesty International Report on sexual violence against indigenous women in the United States.

prosecuting sexual predators. Erdrich published *The Round House* in 2012 at the beginning of a two-yearlong legislative battle in both the house and the senate to renew the Violence Against Women Act. Notably, a provision to extend the jurisdiction of tribal courts in some cases of domestic violence was a major point of contention. This provisional victory, an important step, is limited in scope. This provision only extends to perpetrators in the context of a relationship—this law as it has been revised would still not extend to Linden. Erdrich advocates for these small steps as necessary in progress toward a long-term vision of justice.

The Round House enacts its political victory primarily by training readers to see the way the U.S. justice system is not blind, but "exclusively sighted." Erdrich's child-narrator helps us come to this reading through Joe's youthful curiosity and his admiration for his father, the tribal judge. These choices of characterization serve what Phelan would call "synthetic functions," which are the ways in which characters serve as "artificial constructions within the larger construct of the work" (13). Julie Tharp describes Bazil as "a respected tribal judge, making it perfectly natural that the novel should be liberally sprinkled with references to Felix Cohen's *Handbook of Federal Indian Law*—a much-thumbed family favorite—…. This allows Erdrich to make her real world critiques without damaging the verisimilitude of the novel" (Tharp 29). The legal discussions between father and son become compelling for the reader and necessary for understanding the plot because the young narrator makes clear from the beginning that these seemingly mundane questions will determine justice for his mother. In the very first chapter, the young narrator tells us that after rushing his mother to the hospital, his father calls both the state and tribal police:

> My father had insisted that they each take a statement from my mother because it wasn't clear where the crime had been committed—on state or

> tribal land—or who had committed it—an Indian or a non-Indian. I already knew, in a rudimentary way, that these questions would swirl around the facts. I already knew, too, that these questions would not change the facts. But they would inevitably change the way we sought justice. (Erdrich 12)

The tribal judge and his son already know that justice will depend not on the severity of the crime nor on their ability to prove it, but on the land the crime was committed and on the identity of the criminal. As we learn along with the child the patchwork of laws that foreclose justice for his mother, we rely on his older self, who followed his father to become a tribal judge, to highlight, which questions will be important and which laws make it that way. The sophisticated Joe (having gone to law school) knows when to point out which details will become legally significant such as the "where" and the "who" in the hospital scene.

The visuals the judge uses to teach his son about the jurisdictional challenge helps readers to see that justice in the United States is a matter of how we choose to see. As Joe learns more about what happened at the round house, his father draws a picture to explain why no court will hear his mother's case:

> He turned over a scrap of paper and drew a circle on it, tapped his pencil on the circle. He made a map.
>
> Here's the round house. Just behind it, you have the Smoker allotment, which is now so fractioned nobody can get much use of it. Then a strip that was sold—fee land. The round house is on the far edge of tribal trust, where our court has jurisdiction, though of course not over a white man. So federal law applies. Down to the lake, that is also tribal trust. But just to one side, a

> corner of that is state park, where state law applies. On the other side of the pasture, more words, we have an extension of round house land. (196)

The judge's diagram reveals a patchwork of jurisdiction caused by a history of colonialism: through allotment policies the U.S. government acquired two thirds of Native land[61]; land held in "trust" by the U.S. government echoes of the paternalism that prevented recognition of full sovereignty; and state parks evoke a statist protection of wild places for human recreation rather than a traditional stewardship of the natural world. These twisted histories also result in what Erdrich describes in the novel's "Afterword" as a "tangle of laws that hinder the prosecution of rape cases on many reservations" (319). Amnesty International titles their 2009 report that documents this tangle "Maze of Injustice." The Coutts cannot find their way to a courtroom through this tangled maze because the question of "where" Linden committed the crime remains unanswered. The judge's explanation still holds, however, for many non-fictional Native women who can prove where they were assaulted because of the question of the "who." As Bazil explains to his son, when tribal courts have jurisdiction over the place, such as the round house, but not the people, non-natives, "federal law applies" (Erdrich 196). Erdrich asserts in the novel's "Afterword" that "86 percent of rapes and sexual assaults upon Native women are perpetrated by non-native men" like her novel's Linden Lark (319). While the judge's lesson tells us that federal courts should take these cases, Erdrich draws our attention to the fact that these courts refuse to prosecute "67 percent of sexual abuse cases" ("Rape on the Reservation"). Linden ensures that his violence towards Geraldine would fall into this large percentage of unprosecuted cases by working

[61] For more discussion see chapter 2 and Eric Cheyfitz's *The Columbia Guide to American Indian Literatures of the United States Since 1945* (2006).

with the same map the judge drew for his son, but the circles that Bazil draws as a jurisdictional maze, look to the rapist like an easy target. Geraldine's testimony attests to the way Linden saw this gap between jurisdictions as an open field for his sexual violence. After he raped her, Geraldine explains how Linden has taunted her: "I won't get caught, he said. I've been boning up on law. Funny. Laugh. He nudged me with his shoe. I know as much law as a judge. Know any judges? I have no fear" (Erdrich 161). What Erdrich calls a "tangle" and Amnesty describes as a "maze" arouses and allows the rapist's sexual appetites. Rather than inspiring fear the law endows the white predator with a sense of confidence.

Erdrich does not just leave us with Bazil's word to establish the jurisdictional problems, but backs him up with a history of case law braided together from historic and fictional cases. Joe, who was actually reading the *Handbook of Federal Indian Law*, when his father introduces the central conflict in the form of a missing mother, refers to relevant cases throughout the novel. When we first meet the FBI agent assigned to Geraldine's case, Joe explains,

> That Bjerke was here anyway went back to Ex Parte Crow Dog and then the Major Crimes Act of 1885. That was when the federal government first intervened in the decisions Indians made among themselves regarding restitution and punishment. The reasons for Bjerke's presence continued on through that rotten year for Indians, 1953, when Congress not only decided to try Termination out on us but passed Public Law 280, which gave certain states criminal and civil jurisdiction over Indian lands within their borders. If there was one law that could be repealed or amended for Indians to this day,

> that would be Public Law 280. But on our particular reservation Bjerke's presence was a statement of our toothless sovereignty. (Erdrich 142)

Joe's references to Ex Parte Crow Dog and the Major Crimes Act build credibility for Erdrich's legal assertions. Although Joe doesn't dwell on the details of these cases and laws, his conclusions hold up. The 1883 Supreme Court decision in Ex Parte Crow Dog ruled that Native nations did have jurisdiction over crimes committed on their land, but a year later the U.S. legislature passed a law claiming federal jurisdiction over felonies and other major crimes. Joe's elaboration reminds us that these subjugating policies are not limited to the U.S. nineteenth- century colonial expansion, but persist into the twentieth century when the government tried to "terminate" tribes by writing them out of legal existence. This policy targeted many tribes including Erdrich's own, the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians, but her grandfather tribal Chairman Patrick Gourneau successfully advocated for their continued existence. Public Law 280 applies to other reservations where Congress decided states should have jurisdiction instead of tribal governments or the federal government. While Joe doesn't summarize each of these decisions, his allusions attest to the tangled maze of Indian law.

Even as she delineates the way Indian law fails Native women, Erdrich emphasizes a faith in the potential for legal change through Bazil, the tribal judge. Frustrated by Bazil's commitment to the legal system, even when it so clearly failed Geraldine, Joe asks his father why he bothers:

> I'm going to illustrate this for you, son.
>
> He sat down and waved a couple of forks at me. Then with cool absorption he laid a large carving knife carefully on top of the frozen casserole and all

> around it proceeded to stack one fork, another fork, one on the next adding a spoon here, a butter knife, a ladle, a spatula, until he had a jumble somehow organized into a weird sculpture. He carried over the other four butcher knives my mother always kept keen. These he balanced precariously on top of the other silverware. Then sat back, stroking his chin. (227)

Although Joe thinks his father had "gone a little crazy," he understands how the addled edifice represents Indian law. As the old casserole begins to melt, Joe and his father help readers understand that past legal decisions are not the cool rationale associated with law libraries. Bazil's crazed art equates "the fuzzy black noodles" with the foundational decision of Johnson v. McIntosh where "Justice Marshall went out of his way to strip all Indian title to all lands viewed—i.e. discovered by Europeans" (228). As father and son work their way through subsequent decisions, readers can imagine how the previous cases Joe's mentioned fit into this precarious tower of casserole and cutlery. Bazil's construction even accounts for recent cases like *Oliphant v. Suquamish* (1978), "a particularly disgusting bit of sludge" where the Supreme Court "[t]ook from us the right to prosecute non-Indians who commit crimes on our land. So even if…" (229). Bazil's unfinished sentence connects the casserole conceit with the novel's conflict: even if they did know where Lark committed the crime, Bazil cannot prosecute white men. Despite the spoiled stench that rises from this case history, Bazil emphasizes his commitment to making a more sturdy foundation through Joe's mother's keen butcher knives. In opposition to the rotten mess of bad decisions, Bazil asserts that he and "other tribal judges" work "to build a solid base here for our sovereignty. *We want the right to prosecute criminals of all races on all lands within our original boundaries*. Which is why I try to run a tight courtroom Joe. What I am doing now is for the future,

though it may seem small, or trivial, or boring to you" (Erdrich 229). Even small advances are important in an ongoing struggle. *The Round House* shows how the U.S. legal system denies justice for many Native peoples, but it does not reject the legal system. Rather, by having Joe enact extra-legal justice and still become a tribal judge, Erdrich argues that legal solutions, which honor tribal sovereignty, are possible. As we'll see in the following chapter, *The Round House* helps to envision a type of justice that can anticipate and prevent violence instead of seeking vigilante vengeance. The didactic yet endearing encounters between Joe and his father help prepare readers for the real need of radical revision to Indian Law.

CONCLUSION

Just as Scout "leaped triumphantly into a ring of people" who decided not to be a lynch mob, Lee published *Mockingbird* at a time in U.S. history when many were deciding not to cling to prejudice (172). Scout's questions positioned Mr. Cunningham as a parent deciding not to raise children to be racist, and many have turned to the novel as a collective version of Winnicott's "transitional object" in the hopes that we together may create a society not forged around forced inequality. As we'll see in greater detail in the following chapter, Lee accomplished her shift in the cultural narrative of lynching by breaking white class solidarity and retaining the racial hierarchy. Morrison and Erdrich take up Lee's understanding of the power of the child-narrator and inflect their protagonist's voices with incisive analyses of how racial antagonisms function in the United States. While Lee invites her readers to fill in a worn cultural narrative based on a rape that does not occur, Morrison and Erdrich implore their readers to fill in the specifics of violence that did occur in the novel. Scout's naïve understanding of this social violence allows Lee to shift the way readers interpret that cultural narrative. Morrison and Lee, on the other hand, position their child-

narrators with knowledge that the readers might not know, such as what if feels like to be forced to love a hard white doll or the twisted history of Indian Law. This asymmetrical collaboration not only makes the fiction possible, but also informs the way readers may interpret non-fictional events as well.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE ETHICS OF KILLING BIRDS

I know why the caged bird beats his wing
Till its blood is red on the cruel bars;
For he must fly back to his perch and cling
When he fain would be on the bough a-swing;
And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars
And they pulse again with a keener sting—
I know why he beats his wing!

I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,
When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,—
When he beats his bars and he would be free;
It is not a carol of joy or glee,
But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core,
But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings—
I know why the caged bird sings!

—Paul Laurence Dunbar "Sympathy" (1899)

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

—Maya Angelou "Caged Bird" (1983)

Less than half a century after the formal abolition of slavery in the United States, Paul Laurence Dunbar expressed a deep sympathy between the speaker of his poem and a caged bird. The speaker asserts an intimate knowledge of the caged bird's pain by repeating again and again, "I know why." While the bird's "old, old scars" may throb with the continual resistance to incarceration, Dunbar qualifies this pain with "a keener sting" perhaps to express the sharp disappointment of meeting with the same bloody bars even in an era when one would expect greater opportunities (13). The better part of a century later, Maya

Angelou alludes to Dunbar's refrain in the title of her memoir *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* (1969), and she adopts his conceit in her 1983 poem "Caged Bird" (1983). Although Angelou describes her bird as caged, its cell is not as visible as Dunbar's "cruel bars" (9). Instead, Angelou's bird cannot fly because "his wings are clipped and his feet are tied" (29). While Dunbar wrote in the wake of a failed reconstruction when Jim Crow was both the letter and the wish of the law, Angelou wrote in a time when opportunities are limited by other means. Unlike Dunbar's poem, which features a speaker and solitary bird, Angelou contrasts her caged bird with a free one in an objective third person. Formal boundaries do not keep Angelou's bird from the sky, but painful histories of buried dreams and severed opportunities chain it to the ground. Even as these two poems attest to a subjugation that endures the destruction of forms of chains, they also identify a surprising mode of recourse—art, and in particular, song.

The figure of singing a prayer for freedom acknowledges a tradition from slave times. Using an adjective that at once acknowledges and defies the master discourse's deafness, Frederick Douglass describes these "wild songs" in his *Narrative* (1845), "[e]very tone was a testimony against slavery, and prayer to God for deliverance from chains" (8). In this legal and religious framing, the songs do the work that Douglass hopes his *Narrative* will do: abolish slavery. For Douglass, these songs measure the extent to which slavery desecrates humanity: "[t]o those songs I trace my first glimmering conception of the dehumanizing character of slavery. I can never get rid of that conception. Those songs still follow me, to deepen my hatred of slavery, and quicken my sympathies for my brethren in bonds" (9). Almost sixty years after Douglass's *Narrative*, DuBois published his revolutionary book *The Souls of Black Folk*. DuBois prefaced each chapter with a bar of music from what he terms

the "Sorrow Songs;" in the concluding chapter he explains, "before each thought I have written in this book I have set a phrase, a haunting echo of these weird old songs in which the soul of the black slave spoke to men" (155). Like Douglass's adjective "wild," DuBois's descriptor "weird" acknowledges a dominant discourse that seeks to render these songs and this grievance illegible. What is it about song that defies dehumanization that makes deep suffering bearable? In contrast to the hegemonic silencing tendency, DuBois knows that this music serves as an important medium through which the souls of Black folk speak. He asserts, "the ten master songs I have mentioned tell in word and music of trouble and exile, of strife and hiding; they grope toward some unseen power and sigh for rest in the End" (159). These songs "haunt" because the grief they sing did not die with the formal abolition of slavery or the official death of Jim Crow. For the poets, abolitionists, and philosophers the art of song stands as an important testament of humanity.

In the field of contemporary philosophy, Judith Butler has been wondering "[w]hat *makes for a grievable life*?" (italics in original 20). She understands that loss is one commonality that constitutes "a tenuous 'we' of us all" and queries the way that political machinations mobilize this human potential for grief in ways that render some lives ungrievable and, by extension, not lives at all (22). She knows that our other primary commonality, and perhaps the other face of loss, is vulnerability to violence and annihilation, that "life itself can be expunged by the willful action of another" (28, 29). Butler vacillates between a meditation on the individual, personal loss of the "'you [that] is part of what composes who 'I' am" and a consideration of the many anonymous losses that our collective consciousness cannot mark, that the "genre of the obituary" and "the silence of the newspaper" cannot record (22, 32, 36). Her argument traces an inverse relationship between

vulnerability and grievability; she notes that those Palestinian, Iraqi, Afghani lives lost to Israeli, U.S., and European violence do not register as grievable in the collective psyches of the aggressor nations: "[t]here are no obituaries for the war causalities that the United States inflicts, and there cannot be" (34). Like the foreign deaths, Butler explains how some local losses, such as victims of AIDS and queer victims of the 9/11 attacks trouble our mechanisms of grief. In Butler's analysis, such deaths, abroad and at home, "vanish[], not into explicit discourse, but in the ellipses by which public discourse proceeds" (35). These losses, rendered unfamiliar on the national stage, disappear into silence. Butler clarifies "[i]f there is a 'discourse,' it is silent and melancholic one in which there have been no lives, and no losses; there has been no common bodily condition, no vulnerability that serves as the basis for an apprehension of our commonality; and there has been no surrendering of that commonality" (36). Butler captures and critiques the discursive void through which human commonality disappeared in the "War on Terror" and policies that followed.

The spirit of the Sorrow Songs that continues to echo through both literature and music stands as witness to the discursive evasion that preexists Butler's analysis and the attacks that precipitated it. The failure of recognition that forecloses grief of others stands as a studied condition for the founding of the United States. National newspapers did not record and state curricula still avoid the genocides through which the "land of the free" was forged. While slavery and its legacies have been the "problem" of multiple centuries and often the center of political debate, and the world's oldest surviving democracy has yet to acknowledge these grievances. Unlike other nations that have perpetrated genocide and enslaved races, the United States has offered no official apology, no Truth and Reconciliation Commission, no reparations. The State's refusal to grieve is no new thing, as the determined

deafness to the sorrow shared through song indicates. Just as Dunbar's speaker has to clarify that the caged bird's cry "is not a carol of joy or glee," Douglass and DuBois needed to explain that, in Douglass's words "[i]t is impossible to conceive of a greater mistake" than interpreting "singing, among slaves, as evidence of their contentment and happiness" (18). While DuBois allows that some may have been "careless and happy" these songs "are the music of an unhappy people, of the children of disappointment; they tell of death and suffering and unvoiced longing toward a truer world" (157). In the absence of a public accounting of the wrongs grieved in the songs and those that followed them, members of aggrieved communities in the United States turn to art and activism as the phrases "Sixty Million and more" and "Black Lives Matter" indicate. Both *Beloved*'s dedication and the movement's name state facts that are not yet true. Morrison counts the unknowable number of lives lost through the slave trade according to the abacus of the European Holocaust to condemn the United States' failure to recognize and memorialize its foundational crime and the hashtag's indicative description becomes an ethical imperative in a nation whose past and present behavior practices the contrary.

I begin with the dialogue between Butler's thoughts on grievability and this aesthetic tradition of grief because it raises important questions about how lives matter in the United States that Morrison, Lee and Erdrich raise in their novels. On one hand, all three authors know that the history of the United States is strewn with ungrieved corpses. They position their novels to face the violent history through which U.S. forged its sovereignty. Morrison's oeuvre narrates both slavery as *Beloved* does and the damaging power dynamics that ensued as in *The Bluest Eye*, and Lee engages the tradition of lynching that followed the Civil War. After abolition, southern whites began a tradition of lynching to maintain white supremacy

after the formal abolition of slavery. Ramón Saldívar notes that, during the same period, white people in Texas and the southwest territories committed similar acts of violence against Mexican American people for the same purpose. The same century witnessed the hundreds of massacres through which the United States declared its hegemony. Erdrich's *The Plague of Doves*, as will be discussed in the following chapter on the braided narrative, deals with lynching as "frontier justice." In the south, west, and Texas, these acts of racialized violence were committed by both state and vigilante actors creating a nebulous collaboration that renders those deaths not only ungrievable in the discursive sense indicated by Butler's interest in obituaries and newspapers, but also in the legal sense of a crime in want of justice. Even with such strong traditions of expressing grief and mourning, some Black deaths and grievances remain ungrieved by the U.S. justice system. At the same time as this historical grievance, as we have seen with the genre of Sorrow Songs, grief and mourning can be expressed even if the dominant discourse strives not to hear it. For instance, many civil rights activists and historians cite the murder and funeral of Emmett Till as the beginning of the movement. Despite the public and publicized grief demonstrated at the fourteen-year-old's funeral, the courts acquitted the white men who perpetrated the crime. More recently, grief for seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin and eighteen-year-old Michael Brown sparked the Black Lives Matter movement. Just as the U.S. justice system refused to convict the men who lynched Emmett Till, the white vigilante who killed Trayvon Martin was acquitted of the crime, and a grand jury refused to charge the police officer who murdered Michael Brown. The way in which these murders were grieved publicly but were not legible in the court of law suggests that there is a third term between vulnerability and grievability: the historical and continuing conspiracy between law enforcement and vigilante

violence renders some people "killable" irrespective of their grievability. Being "killable" means that the skewed cultural logic has deemed one's murder permissible—that one's extralegal execution, if not justified, cannot be adjudicated in a court of law.

The question of how a person can become killable or escape that fate is the child's concern in *The Bluest Eye*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *The Round House*. Claudia frames *The Bluest Eye* with "a need for someone to want the black baby to live" (190). Although she tells us that Pecola's child is dead by her third paragraph, she also makes clear that her purpose is to invite readers to join her in imagining a world in which this child should live. Against the current of the adult women's consensus at the novel's close that there "[o]ught to be a law: two ugly people doubling up like that to make more ugly. Be better off in the ground," Claudia and her sister want to imagine the baby's life as desirable, livable, lovable (190). The unnamed friend of their mother who voices the easy negation of the child born of incest frames her condemnation in the ethical terms of "ought" and the "law." *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s titular and oft-repeated aphorism foregrounds the same concern that Claudia raises. Although Atticus couches his rule in the language of the church, "the only time I ever heard Atticus say it was a sin to do something," Scout uses the saying to evaluate and excuse Atticus's decision to lie about how Mr. Ewell died (103). The child's interpretation agrees with the adult's determination that one man's death is not grievable if it means the unwanted social exposure of a heroic neighbor. While many critics read the temporary postponement of Tom Robinson's lynching as another fulfillment of Atticus's precept, his eventual death at the unrestrained hands of a prison guard demands a different interpretation—even if his life is worth defending in a court of law, the carceral system makes him killable.

Erdrich, who strategically patterns *The Round House* after *Mockingbird*, makes more incisive arguments about killability. First, as we have already seen, she raises awareness about violence against Native women; the novel's opening crime is not just a rape, but also a murder of a seventeen-year-old whose body is never found. Erdrich includes the ungrieved and unsolved murder of Mayla Wolfskin to argue that the femicide the U.S. likes to imagine as occurring outside, or at least at our borders, is happening here, too. Unlike Canada where the government in 2016 established a National Inquiry into "Missing and Murdered Indigenous Girls and Women" or Mexico, which received international scrutiny for its failure to stop the murders in Juarez, the United States does not keep statistics on and has not acknowledged this problem.[62] At the same time, Erdrich asks her readers to consider what makes a white man killable. While Erdrich does not advocate for the vigilante murder that she depicts in the novel, her engagement with the question may help us understand the contemporary violence that infects our society.

Where Butler makes persuasive and thoughtful claims about broad categories, the novelists concern themselves with particular situations, particular instances, particular stories, which in turn comment on social forces. This attention to the specific is important because, as we saw in the second chapter, the particular makes legible and accessible certain

[62] Erdrich is not alone in offering aesthetic testament to the violence against Native women: the 2017 thriller *Wind River* represents the violence Native women may face and tries to explain how hard those crimes are to trace and try. Like the "Afterword" at the end of *The Round House* which explains the accuracy of the novel's central violence, the film closes with a statement of fact: "[w]hile missing person statistics are compiled for every other demographic, none exist for Native American women."

understandings about racial hierarchies that some have trained themselves to be blind to. At the same time, the particularity essential to a novel can also prevent the wide-sweeping assumptions that every member of a given category shares the same experiences. For instance, in *The Bluest Eye* being killable or grievable is not a condition of an entire race even in the limited context of 1940s United States, but rather is something that can happen to individuals under certain conditions. Like Angelou's poem which contrasts a free bird with a caged one, Morrison's novel focuses on two young girls: first, nine-year-old Claudia, who narrates in her confident, insightful voice, and second, eleven-year-old Pecola, who Morrison has Claudia describe as "a wounded bird." While Morrison allows the first to mature into a thoughtful, reflective person, indicated by the temporal moment of narrating, she, in her own words "smash[es]" the second (211). Morrison's novel certainly comments on racial assumptions, but it does so through specific personalities and individual histories. After the teasing of her classmates, for instance, Pecola "seemed to fold into herself, like a pleated wing" (73). While the painful experiences that trap Pecola in her life do seem to be the "nightmare scream" Angelou describes in her poem, they do not cause Pecola to sing (29). Instead, Claudia ends the novel with a description of Pecola stalks her yard, just as Dunbar and Angelou's birds circle their cages, but importantly Pecola paces without voice: "[e]lbows bent, hands on shoulders, she flailed her arms like a bird in an eternal, grotesquely futile effort to fly. Beating the air, a winged but grounded bird, intent on the blue void it could not reach—could not even see—but which filled the valleys of the mind" (204). While the free bird in Angelou's poem "names the sky his own," Pecola still obsesses over "the blue void" that describes both the sky where her broken-bird self cannot fly and the vacuity of the bluest eye that cause and cannot solve her problems (26). "The upland slopes" that Dunbar's bird

longs for become the mental contours of Pecola's mind filled with the fantasy she invents to make her life bearable (2).

Although the children care about these questions of life or death, in all three novels, authors use different strategies to raise these ethical queries in readers' minds without full awareness of their child-narrators. By juxtaposing the child's voice with omniscient sections that account for Pecola's experience, Morrison helps to forge the genre of the braided narrative, which I focus on in the next chapter. Through these sections we learn, among other things, about Pecola's parents' backgrounds, and just as Claudia asks us to care for Pecola, Morrison frames these sections in a way that invites a sort of sympathy with the parents who cause her harm. Different narrative strands, narrated in different voices, help readers hold different ethical questions in our mind simultaneously. Even as she demands we condemn Cholly's violence, Morrison makes us understand how it came to be. While Lee's narrative remains inside Scout's perspective, she equips Scout with particular values and imagery that serve to maintain white supremacy even as Lee attempts to rework those assumptions. Scout learns not to judge people before you've seen the world from their front porch, but Lee weakens her progressive project by sprinkling Scout's narration with Confederate values and describing Tom Robinson's death with imagery that echoes the execution of the mad dog. Erdrich, like Morrison, intersperses her narrative with stories told in different voices that the child-narrator hears but does not fully understand. Taken together, "Linda's Story," Geraldine's testimony, and Mooshum's three-part dream, impart a traditional form of justice and propose how it might apply to contemporary predators. Erdrich and Morrison's choice to include different voices within their children's narration attests to the ethical power of sound. Their novels attune readers to different modes of

perception that envelop and expand the limits of traditional Western discourse. In this way, Morrison and Erdrich show that ethics is about more than just sight—it's not only about standing in someone else's shoes, but also about allowing their experience to resonate with that of others and our own.

Because the central (alleged in *Mockingbird*) crimes occurred before their respective novel opens, the narrative progression deals more with *how* that violence is possible than with *why* it occurred. As Claudia remarks at the beginning of *The Bluest Eye*, "*since* why *is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in* how" (italics in original 6). Judging the crime is not at stake in any of the novels. In *Mockingbird*, readers understand Tom Robinson's innocence—if there was a crime, it is the violence Mr. Ewell inflicted on his own daughter. *The Bluest Eye* opens and closes with a condemnation of incestual rape—this horrible aggression shatters Pecola, breaks her family, and damages Claudia and Frieda, the child witnesses. Further, in *The Round House*, although we do not know the full details about the pre-novel rape, there is no doubt that it occurred. Because all these crimes (or in the case of *Mockingbird* imagined crimes) occurred before the novels' stories, the authors do not focus on those acts of violence themselves, but rather how to live in a world and respond to the aggressors after the events occur. In other words, there is no question of Cholly and Linden's guilt or Tom Robinson's innocence, but rather, the issue at the core of all the novels is how to make sense of that guilt and innocence—how to understand the sexual violence and how to work towards justice. This involves the social scripts and cultural narratives discussed in the last chapter. For Lee, interpreting Tom Robinson's innocence has to do with breaking a social group—rather than trafficking only in the Black white divide, Lee has her child characters learn about a variety of "kinds" of people. By separating the Ewells from the

town folk, Lee can create another other, poor white people, to blame for racial violence. On the one hand, this allows her to shift the cultural narrative to one that accepts and assumes Tom Robinson innocent, but killable, but on the other hand it renders the Ewells both violable (Mayella was beaten and possibly sexually abused) and killable (Mr. Ewell's murder is accepted by the law and father). Just as Lee creates "kinds" of white folk, in *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison disrupts the social script that assumes Black men as sexually aggressive. While still condemning Cholly's actions, she makes his story a particular, non-representative case and works to explain how social structures push him to rape and incest. *The Round House* returns to "kinds" of white people by proposing windiigoo hermeneutics as a way of reading white predatory greed that manifests itself both in terms of sexual violence and conquest.

THE BLUEST EYE

> If my mother was in a singing mood, it wasn't so bad. She would sing about hard times, bad times, and somebody-done-gone-and left-me times. But her voice was so sweet and her singing-eyes so melty I found myself longing for those hard-times, yearning to be grown without "a thin di-i-ime to my name." I looked forward to the delicious time when "my man" would leave me, when I would know "my man has left this town." Misery colored by the greens and blues in my mother's voice took all of the grief out of the words and left me with a conviction that pain was not only endurable, it was sweet.
>
> —Claudia MacTeer *The Bluest Eye* (25-26)

As the many murders in Morrison's fiction attest, it is not the plot event that matters as much as way the writer asks readers to interpret it. The double deaths at the beginning of

The Bluest Eye, Pecola's baby and her psyche, are the first of many child-deaths that mark the pages of Morrison's fiction (the murder at the center of *Beloved*, the immolation of Eva Peace's children in *Sula*, and the suffocation of Marvis's twins in *Paradise* name other important instances). Claudia MacTeer, *The Bluest Eye*'s major character narrator reads the cause of Pecola's miscarriage in her own failure to cultivate marigolds, imagery that opens and closes the novel. Morrison encourages readers to interpret the infant's death as a question of responsibility by locating Claudia's hopes that the marigolds "will change the course of events and alter human life" in what Rabinowitz would call the "privileged position" of the beginning and the end because writers often locate information important to the novel's interpretation (191). Further, while Morrison uses an omniscient narrator to describe the process through which Pecola sublimates the "profound wish that she herself could die" into the fantasy of having blue eyes, she, again turns to Claudia's narrative voice to help readers know how we should read that self-hatred (43). Morrison adopts motifs of singing and storytelling that not only help characters interpret their own lives—sometimes in damaging ways—but also figure the novel's narrative structure. In this way, Morrison's prose is almost like the "greens and blues" Mrs. MacTeer's songs. The author, like her character, gives voice to misery in a way that endows it with a melty-eyed beauty that makes it speakable, bearable. Claudia loves her mother's songs not only because they pause Mrs. MacTeer's tirades, but more so because she enjoys the very sound of her mother's voice. Mrs. MacTeer's songs echo, in a softer key, the way the Sorrow Songs simultaneously express pain and make it bearable. Douglass writes, "the songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart; and he is relieved by them, only as an aching heart is relieved by its tears" (9). In Morrison's prose, female voices not only hold pain and give voice to violence

in a way that makes that suffering endurable, even "sweet" from the perspective of a child. Although Morrison asks her adult readers to acknowledge the grief in the words, the sweetness of the voice makes that an accessible, even inviting prospect.

Morrison situates her young girls as the contended audience of songs even as they become the subject of her song—in both senses, the image of a mother holding her child in song or a woman holding another's pain in her voice figures Morrison's narrative project. In her 1993 "Afterword" Morrison explains,

> And since the victim [Pecola] does not have the vocabulary to understand the violence or its context, gullible vulnerable girlfriends [Claudia and Frieda], looking back as the knowing adults they pretended to be in the beginning, would have to do that for her, and would have to fill those silences with their own reflective lives. Thus, the opening provides the stroke that announces something more than a secret shared, but a silence broken, a void filled, an unspeakable thing spoken at last. (214)

In the face of Pecola's devastating silence, her bred inability to speak her own pain, Claudia, our narrator, and her sister Frieda "fill in" what the victim cannot say both as children and as adults reflecting back. The fragile voices of girlfriends, even if inflected by their adult understanding, help speak the unspeakable thing. While Morrison conceptualizes the motif that mobilizes the female voice as "black fence" gossip through which secrets are shared, we can also see how she figures this sharing through song (212). Both forms require a choral telling, both tolerate different versions of events, both embrace ranges of voices, and both position their audience as potential participants. Gossip has a cheap connotation as someone's hardship becomes the currency of neighborhood chatter, whereas song, especially

in the aesthetic tradition of the Sorrow Songs, is transformative not only for those whose stories are sung, but for the listeners, too. Considering *The Bluest Eye* as a testament of music as well as a test of gossip help us to see the narrative innovations Morrison makes through her first novel. In addition to championing the child's voice to narrate collective violence, Morrison shapes a braided narrative, where different stories harmonize to form a novel.

Morrison dedicates much of the novel's 1993 "Afterword" to detailing her decision to write from the perspective of the child in a Black feminine voice. Morrison attributes *The Bluest Eye*'s novelty to this narrative perspective: "this story of female violation revealed from the vantage point of the victims or could-be victims of rape—persons no one inquired of (certainly not in 1965): the girls themselves" (214). Just as Claudia and her sister have to fill in their girlfriend's silences, Morrison positions readers to fill in what the children cannot say. For Morrison, Claudia's opening line "[q]uiet as it's kept" best captures this intention because of its familiarity "to me as a child listening to adults; to Black women conversing with one another, telling a story, an anecdote, gossip about some one or event within the circle, the family, the neighborhood" (211-2). The intimacy and conspiracy associated with gossip serves as an important motif for Morrison. The opening phrase invites readers to participate as other woman or children listening on the porch. In this way Morrison positions her readers as the recipients of privileged knowledge, secrets in the community, but "the one who knows, is a child speaking, mimicking the adult Black women on the porch or in the backyard" (213). Morrison sounds the child's lack of knowledge, and initiates the reader's need to fill it in in these first sentences, without making us put down the text. In order to do this, Morrison relies on the instant relationship established through illicit sharing

of secrets; she writes, "[s]udden familiarity or instant intimacy seemed crucial to me. I did not want the reader to have time to wonder, 'What do I have to do, to give up, in order to read this? What defense do I need, what distance maintain?'" (213) Instead, she primes us with the child's articulation and interpretation of the crime: "We thought, at the time, that it was because Pecola was having her father's baby that the marigolds did not grow" (5). By the second sentence of the novel, we know the violation, but the child's voice suggests it will be narrated gently, naively. The child tries to be mature about the knowledge she's sharing by striving to speak in her mother's voice, and in the same gesture invites readers to join this community. Just as the child-narrator longs to be the protagonist of her mother's songs, her narration strives for the mature woman's voice, but her youth prevents her from fully knowing the grief the songs and story sing. As Morrison puts it, Claudia and her sister "spend that whole year of childhood (and afterword) trying to fathom [the violence they disclose], and cannot. If they have any success, it will be in transferring the problem of fathoming to the presumably adult reader, to the inner circle of listeners" (214). Accepting Claudia's secrets and supplementing them with our own understanding bind readers in her communicative community. We take on her task of fathoming the violence that the children cannot.

Like the polyvocality of gossip itself, Morrison supplements Claudia's story with omniscient sections providing backstories for other characters, and thus equips readers with other stories, other knowledge, other intimacies, that we must layer with Claudia's knowledge. These supplemental stories make the novel a braided narrative: each omniscient section follows a different set of characters, mainly the Breedloves, but also Geraldine and Soaphead Church, as they interact with Pecola. Morrison titles each of these sections with a

fast (un-spaced) and angry (capitalized) excerpt from the Dick and Jane story that opens the novel. After Claudia's introduction of to home and the major characters in "Autumn," Morrison invites us into the Breedlove's bare, violent house in "HEREISTHEHOUSE." The omniscient section does not explain the specific instance that causes the state to place Pecola in the MacTeer's home, but does give a glimpse of the lack of love and intimacy that makes domestic abuse routine. After Claudia's "Winter" section on schoolyard bullying, the omniscient narrator takes us inside the starched white home of the chaste "brown girls" to show how racialized hierarchies breed cruelty even within the subordinated community (81). Morrison follows Claudia's account of her parent's protection of Frieda with Pecola's parents' backstories, and another consideration of colorisim through the character of Soaphead Church closes with the final fulfillment Pecola's wish. By layering Claudia's narration with these omniscient sections, Morrison foregrounds Claudia's own interpretation not as a definitive account, but as a hermeneutic model. Although Claudia knows Cholly fathered Pecola's deceased child, she does not know enough to blame him for the death of the infant or the shattering of his daughter. Instead, Claudia petitions for Pecola and her child's life to matter. Morrison's braided narrative asks us to also consider the other death that Claudia discloses almost in the same breath: "Cholly Breedlove is dead; our innocence too. The seeds shriveled and died; her baby too" (6). While Claudia's sections query how to help Pecola and her child, the omniscient sections that follow them both narrate Pecola's experiences and attempt to explain the social conditions that lead to that abuse. Morrison asks her readers to hold Cholly responsible and accountable for his crime, but she also prevents his total condemnation. Instead, if we approach the several omniscient sections

with the concern for life that Claudia models, we can see how she pushes us to care for the lives of those who abused Pecola as well.

Morrison frames the omniscient sections that detail Pauline and Cholly's backstory by two parental rejections—Claudia witnesses the first and has already told us about the second. "SEEMOTHER" immediately follows the scene where Mrs. Breedlove turns away from her daughter, burned by the accidentally spilt cobbler, in order to comfort the white child, and "SEEFATHER" closes with the omniscient account of the child's rape that we have been dreading and anticipating since Claudia first spoke. Morrison makes sure to blame both parents for this violation with that section's closing sentence: "[s]o when the child regained consciousness, she was lying on the kitchen floor under a heavy quilt, trying to connect the pain between her legs with the face of her mother looming over her" (163). Because we already know the paternal crime and just read the maternal rejection, the opening sentence of "SEEMOTHER" positions these sections as a defense of the parents: "[t]he easiest thing to do would be to build a case out of her foot. That is what she herself did. But to find out the truth about how dreams die, one should never take the word of the dreamer" (110). While Morrison doesn't make clear which crime we're trying Pauline for, she does allow Mrs. Breedlove to testify by interspersing italicized quotes in Pauline's own voice throughout the omniscient narration. Just as we couldn't fully trust the child's account, the narrator cautions us not to trust the dreamer's version either. Morrison's framing invites sympathy, but not full forgiveness for Pauline—instead, as she does with the other sections, she pushes us to consider the conditions that make violence possible. In Pauline's case, Morrison is more explicit. While Pauline would like to blame her unnamed crime on a bad foot, Morrison points to a missing tooth, but even that has facilitating circumstances: "[b]ut

even before the little brown speck, there must have been the conditions, the setting that would allow it to exist in the first place" (116). The narrator and the dreamer agree on the condemning conditions and sorry setting for Pauline: the lonesomeness of Lorain, Ohio. Pauline, in her own italicized voice, explains, "*[n]orthern colored folk was different too. Dicty-like. No better than whites for meanness. They could make you feel just as no-count, 'cept I didn't expect if from them. That was the lonesomest time of my life*" (italics in original 117). The turning point for Pauline is not Cholly's violence, but rather the cruelty of the community, which precedes and causes the domestic abuse.

While loneliness seems a poor excuse to reject one's child, the way Morrison renders Pauline's life in Lorain reveals the painful dissonance that can result when one's own experience is not reflected in society's social fabric or held by a community of friends. Pauline yearns in particular for female attention and felt "uncomfortable with the few black women she met" because their "goading glances and private snickers" judged her hair and accent (119). Morrison presents Pauline with an alternative narrative on the silver screen, where "in the dark [Pauline's] memory was refreshed, and she succumbed to her earlier dreams" (122). What she cannot find in life, Pauline finds in the fiction of the cinema: in the darkness the demeaning eyes cannot see Pauline and she can give herself over to the dramas on the screen. This refreshment involves a reset however because it realigns Pauline's moral compass along the false cardinals of Hollywood's beauty standard. Morrison writes, "[s]he was never able, after her education in the movies, to look at a face and not assign it some category in the scale of absolute beauty, and the scale was one she absorbed in full from the silver screen" (121). At first, Pauline tries to emulate the picture perfect beauty of the stars on the screen, but then she loses her tooth: "*[t]here I was, five months pregnant, trying to*

look like Jean Harlow, and a front tooth gone. Everything went then. Look like I just didn't care no more after that. I let my hair go back, plaited it up, and settled down to just being ugly" (123). In her own voice, Pauline not only notices the difference between herself and the star, but also codes it according to her moralized standards of beauty: in Pauline's mind the difference marks her as ugly. Pauline cannot conform to the ideal of the movies any easier than she can meet the standard of her northern peers, but in the "magnificent whole" of the "black-and-white images," Pauline learns the only role available to her in the U.S.'s master fiction: "the ideal servant" (122). What Pauline cannot obtain for her own life and family, comes easily to the white family she works for, and as their servant, she can serve as arbiter of it all. While playing the social role of servant, Pauline can walk on carpeted floors, sort a month's worth of canned food, and expect the choicest meat, a stark contrast to the bare hardness and hunger of her own home. Playing a part also helps Pauline "[come] into own with the women who had despised her" she changes her accent to conform with the community, attempts "be[] more moral" by casting Cholly as her "cross to bear," and joins a church that "frowns on" traditions associated with Black evangelical churches such as shouting (126-7). Just as Pauline excels at the role of "ideal servant" she survives by the part she's formed for herself at the church.

While Pauline's coming of age involves forming herself according to socially imposed subordinating standards, Morrison does offer an art form that gives voice to Pauline's feelings rather than predetermining what her behavior should be. In church in Kentucky, Pauline feels herself to be the subject of song. Gospel music gives voice and vocabulary to emotions Pauline does not yet have words for: "[t]here was a woman named Ivy who seemed to hold in her mouth all of the sounds of Pauline's soul. Standing a little

apart from the choir, Ivy sang the dark sweetness that Pauline could not name" (114). Although this song, like the movies, comes from outside Pauline, Ivy sings sounds already inside her. Instead of educating Pauline on skewed beauty standards as the cinema does, the church's "songs caressed her" and affirm her own emotions and experience (113). While the films train Pauline in a perverse moral code, she does not adopt the Christian hermeneutics associated with the song in this initial scene, but rather uses the lyrics to read her own life. The narrator frames Cholly's arrival by the song Ivy was singing: "Take My Hand Precious Lord." In place of the savior's arrival, the narrator locates Cholly: "the Stranger, the someone, did appear out of nowhere," and because she heard it first in song "Pauline was grateful but not surprised" (114). Even after moving to Lorain, Pauline uses the lyrics of Ivy's song to make sense of her life. Confronted with the physical dreariness of Ohio, the logistical dreariness of economics, and most importantly the social dreariness of the community, Pauline remembers the second verse.

> She was still no more than a girl, and still waiting for that plateau of happiness, that hand of a precious Lord who, when her way grew drear, would always linger near. Only now she had a clearer idea of what drear meant. Money became the focus of all their discussions, hers for clothes, his for drink. The sad thing was that Pauline did not really care for clothes and makeup. Pauline did not really care for clothes and makeup. She merely wanted other women to cast favorable glances her way. (118)

The words that had originally given voice to "the sounds of Pauline's soul" now give her vocabulary to describe her experience in Lorain. Morrison makes clear that it's not only the interpretive power of the song, but the very attention it carries. Morrison introduces the

particular song through the name and timber of the singer: Ivy sings "a dark sweetness" and she closes this passage with the same desire: feminine acknowledgement.

Although Morrison emphasizes the power of the female voice, she does not limit her argument to women alone: in "SEEFATHER" she describes one of Cholly's only positive attachments also in terms of the verbal arts. Instead of caring for the child through song, the "nice old man called Blue Jack" shows his affection for Cholly through narrative:

> Blue used to tell him old-timey stories about how it was when the Emancipation Proclamation came. How the black people hollered, cried, and sang. And ghost stories about how a white man cut off his wife's head and buried her in the swamp, and the headless body came out at night and went stumbling around the yard, knocking over stuff because it couldn't see, and crying all the time for a comb. They talked about the women Blue had had, and the fights he'd been in when he was younger, about how he talked his way out of getting lynched once, and how others hadn't. (133-4)

While Pauline learns her ways of reading the world through Gospel and cinema, Cholly gets his education through stories. Blue teaches him about history, white people's violence and whims, women. Morrison begins and ends the catalogue with casual references to the U.S.'s chronologic strategies of subordination: slavery and lynching. That Morrison folds ghost stories neatly between the presidential decree, the teller's personal history, and extralegal violence anticipates her eventual vision in *Beloved* of U.S. history as a ghost story. Just as Claudia's contentment comes from the sweetness of her mother's voice, and Pauline's pleasure comes from the affirmation in the dark sweetness of Ivy's notes, Cholly's love for Blue comes from the comfort he feels in the good times he shared with the older man (135).

After the white hunters violate Cholly's first sexual encounter, he wants to turn to Blue, but, as the narrator reports, "[o]ld Blue was too drunk too often these days to make sense. Besides, Cholly doubted if he could reveal his shame to Blue. He would have to lie a little to tell Blue, Blue the woman-killer. It seemed to him that lonely was much better than alone" (151). Just as Pauline's loneliness in Lorain stems from the absence of an affirming intersubjective community, positive acknowledgement from other women, Cholly's choice of loneliness comes from Blue's inebriated inability to engage in conversation and Cholly's own fear that he could not bring himself to confide in Blue. While Pauline uses the lyrics to "Take My Hand Precious Lord," Cholly mixes his own emotions with the stories Blue tells. None of the stories mentioned in the text position Blue as a murderer, but after Cholly turns his own shame and impotence into hatred to Darlene, "the one who bore witness to his failure," he re-remembers Blue as "Blue the woman-killer" (151). This new memory twines the stories Blue does tell (the white man murdering his wife, Blue's lovers, Blue's fights, and the escaped lynching) with Cholly's recent experience. Just as Pauline uses the feminine voice to frame her experiences, Cholly uses Blue's stories to think through his. In both cases, the absence of an intersubjective community to respond to these thoughts facilitates the loneliness that turns to violence.

Just as Pauline's "education at the movies" lead her to adopt a moral compass that conflates a white beauty standard with goodness, Cholly's interpretive strategies map a skewed morality onto stories. Morrison uses a favorite memory with Blue to frame an allegory that emerges in Cholly's mind:

> Long after he was a man, he remembered the good times they had had. How at a July 4 at a church picnic a family was about to break open a watermelon.

> Several children were standing around watching. Blue was hovering about on the periphery of the circle—a faint smile of anticipation softening his face. The father of the family lifted the melon high over his head—his big arms looked taller than the trees to Cholly, and the melon blotted out the sun. Tall, head forward, eyes fastened on a rock, his arms higher than the pines, his hands holding a melon bigger than the sun, he paused an instant to get his bearing and secure his aim. Watching the figure etched against the bright blue sky, Cholly felt goose pimples popping along his arms and neck. He wondered if God looked like that. No. God was a nice old white man, with long white hair, flowing white beard, and little blue eyes that looked sad when people died and mean when they were bad. It must be the devil who looks like that—holding the world in his hands, ready to dash it to the ground and spill the red guts so ni----- could eat the sweet, warm insides. If the devil did look like that, Cholly preferred him. He never felt anything thinking about God, but just the idea of the devil excited him. And now the strong, black devil was blotting out the sun and getting ready to split open the world. (134)

In this memory, Cholly and Blue frame the picture of a Black family headed by a larger than life father. While the narrator doesn't mention a mother, the "several children" implies that there was one, and the exaggerated image of the father underscores the absence of Cholly's. In young Cholly's mind the giant figure of the father looks as if he could hold the world in his hands. While the child wants to imagine that the Black father could be God, his own Christian education taught him that "God was a nice old white man" (134). The narrator's voice shifts from describing the child's wonder and emotion, "goose pimples popping along

his arms and neck" to asserting the indicative 'fact' of white dominance and imperative of Black sin: "God was" white, the Black man "must be the devil" (134). Cholly, who has no parents, admires and "prefer[s] … the strong, black devil," and even though Blue hasn't yet turned to alcohol, he doesn't correct the child's moral misinterpretation. While Pauline who embraces her role as "ideal servant" in the white hierarchy, Cholly even as a child is "excited" by an identification with depravity. He sees destruction as the path to pleasure—the father must break the world in order to enjoy the "sweet, warm insides" (134). What is a wholesome fourth of July family activity becomes for the spectating child a model for violence. For the reader, the watermelon's "red guts" not only echo the spilt cobbler that burned Pecola's legs, but prefigure the blood that will mark her rape at the end of this section.

Song, stories, and gossip do not only serve as powerful ways for characters to make sense of their lives, but also as strong figures for Morrison's narrative voice and structure. Although Morrison is self-critical about her ability to sustain the female voice throughout the novel, we can see that it carriers through song. In the "Afterword," Morrison writes, "although I was pressing for a female expressiveness, it eluded me for the most part, and I had to content myself with female personae because I was not able to secure throughout the work the feminine subtext that is present in the opening sentence (the women gossiping, eager and aghast in 'Quiet as it's kept')" (215). Although she may not maintain the gossipy tone, she does communicate the consistent power of song and story. In between the comforting cadence of Mrs. MacTeer's singing voice and the knowing notes of Ivy's Gospel songs, Morrison gives, Poland, one of the prostitutes who Pecola likes to visit a "sweet, strawberry voice" (58). Further, Pecola delights in Miss Marie's stories just as Cholly enjoys

Blues's. Pecola loves the prostitutes because they are some of the only adults in the novel who give her attention, "concoct[] stories for her," and sing her songs (57). As melodies of Blues, Jazz, and Gospel, descendants of the Sorrow Songs, drift through the text intertwined with traditions of storytelling, Morrison herself layers stories on top of Claudia's dominant account. The figure of music allows for multiple voices singing different melodies and we have to read in a way that hears the harmony. Characters enjoy being the audience of songs and stories because it feels good—because the singer's voice gives them a positive, affirming attention even when the songs are sad. The words speak a shared sadness, but the melody and sound—"the greens and blues" in the voice hold the listener as a loved audience, worthy of a "for me alone" performance (Morrison 25, 22). Although Morrison positions us Claudia as a model for readers in many ways, she does not ask us to forget "the grief [] of the words," but instead to acknowledge it (26). We must read in a way that attends to the polyvocality because speaking unspeakable things helps make them endurable.

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

The caged birds' songs encourage us to read Atticus's aphorism more closely. Atticus concedes to his children's demand for air-rifles but won't teach them to shoot; instead he cautions them: "[s]hoot all the bluejays you want, if you can hit 'em, but remember it's a sin to kill a mockingbird" (103). The way Lee asks us to interpret this moral advice should shed light on the way that reading figurative language can connect to the way we interpret actual events (103). By the end of the novel, Scout's memory of her father's rule becomes the necessary excuse for Atticus to agree with the sheriff's decision to interpret the murder of Mr. Ewell as an accident: he "fell on his own knife" (317). Acknowledging that Boo stabbed Mr. Ewell to protect the Finches would be akin to shooting an innocent

songbird that, in Miss Maudie's terms, "do[esn't] do one thing but make music for us to enjoy" (103). While in Lee's novel this gentlemen's agreement is an act of kindness even acknowledgment of a someone who, as Sheriff Tate says, has "done you and this town a great service," in our own moment, when mental illness is used to explain white terrorism, this decision not to see white guilt becomes more uncomfortable (317). In the novel, Scout and her father's recognition of Boo's heroism and respect for his "shy ways" stands as one of the major acts of empathy that is well-worth teaching in eighth grade (317). However, this late-night forgiveness cannot serve as precedent and renders Bob Ewell killable—the characters do not believe this villain deserves a fair trial. Although sanity is an important subtext of this chapter and Lee's novel might also support to the contemporary critique of the state apparatus for dealing with this insanity, here, I want to turn to the underexplained half of Atticus's dictum.

What make the bluejays killable? Miss Maudie's explanation implies that bluejays don't deserve the same protection as mockingbirds because they "eat up people's gardens" or "nest in corncribs," an explanation that seems to concur with the earlier statement of Mr. Radley's shotgun: messing around in his collard patch is a capital offense, regardless of whether the offender is, in Miss Stephanie's words "a dog, a n---, or— Jem *Finch*!" (italics in original 61). Miss Stephanie didn't intend to include Jem in this odd list, but Lee inserts him there in a gesture of dramatic irony as he, having left his pants at the scene of the crime, approaches the gossiping adults. It is an unfortunate list to be on, as both a particular dog and particular man get shot over the course of the novel, and, although Jem survives *Mockingbird*, he is the only Finch who has died before *Go Set a Watchman*, *Mockingbird*'s storied sequel, opens. In "Where is your mother?", we saw how the mad dog scene sets a

pattern that Lee repeats to help her readers read Scout's actions in the lynch scene and Atticus's defense as heroic. In that scene, Atticus had to shoot the rabid dog to protect his children and the town, just as he has to stand up against his community who, as he says, "go stark raving mad when anything involving a Negro comes up" (100). Connecting rabies and racism seems reasonable, but why shoot Tom Robinson? In the brief scene Lee allows to the story of his death, Atticus explains that at the prison Tom "just broke into a blind raving charge at the fence" (268). In lazy or sinister accident, Lee crosses the lines of her imagery—the rabid madness she mapped onto racist mob is here projected onto the racialized subject (although we might have seen this coming in the resonance of the names of the canine and human victims: Tim Johnson and Tom Robinson). As Lee's progressive agenda breaks down, Tom runs "raving" like the mad dog might, the jail guards fire a warning shot into the air as Mr. Radley did for his collard-patch intruder, and then take aim, hitting Tom seventeen times, an excess that "One-Shot Finch" judges: "they didn't have to shoot him that much" (100, 268). But for Tom Robinson, like Amadou Diallo, Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, and all the other people killed by police or Mr. Radley-like neighbors, one shot was too much.

While it'd be nice to think that Lee included this detail in an effort to critique police violence or even the prison system, as I've already written more words on the scene than she included in it, I doubt that's the case. Instead, I think Tom Robinson's death is further evidence that his character functions as an Africanist, synthetic device for the moral development of Atticus, his children, and white readers. Lee accomplishes some lofty goals through *Mockingbird*—she helps change the lynch narrative, and she shifts gender expectations through Scout—but she does not escape the viral impulses of white supremacy.

Although she strives to rewrite the lynching narrative that demands Black men's deaths, she diverts that urge to another narrative, one that Gutiérrez-Jones already outlined in the trials of the beating of Rodney King and murder of Amadou Diallo. Atticus, perhaps expressing his grief through sarcasm or exposing the prejudice that will overtake him in old age in *Watchman*, rehearses his perspective-taking strategy: "[d]epends on how you look at it… What was one Negro, more or less, among two hundred of 'em? He wasn't Tom to them, he was an escaping prisoner" (269). Just as the prosecutors and judges in the trials of King and Diallo asked jurors to sympathize with the police officers, Atticus explains how the jail guards must have seen it. Atticus understands that prison guards cannot see Tom's individuality, his personhood, but instead see him as a prisoner, who must be shot before escaping. Interestingly, Lee sets this scene in the domestic space of the kitchen at a moment when the Finch house had been taken over by Aunt Alexandra's missionary group. Unlike his progressive gestures in the masculine spaces of the jailhouse or the courtroom, Atticus's cynicism emerges in the presence of adult white women. Importantly, in Atticus's formation, Tom is not an innocent man escaping wrongful confinement, but a prisoner who has lost faith in appeal. The breakdown of Lee's imagery and the bitter, supremacist direction Atticus's strategies of empathy render Black lives, in the novel's imagery, as less valuable than mockingbirds.

Lee balances the innocence of what Scout doesn't know with not-so-subtle lessons in Southern pride. While most readers take Lee at her word that Scout didn't know what the lynch mob intended, Ako-Adjei reminds us that children often participated in such violence. We believe in Scout's innocence, however, because her explanations, all along, demonstrate detailed understanding of her culture's history that blatantly dismisses the historical

experience of non-white people. On the very first page, Scout rather cavalierly names the original sin that not only made possible the novel's story, but also the tale of the American dream itself. Scout asserts "it really began with Andrew Jackson. If General Jackson hadn't run the Creeks up the creek, Simon Finch would never have paddled up the Alabama and where would we be if he hadn't?" (3). Rather than engaging the history of the violent removal of the Creek people through the trail of tears, Scout's childish assertion touches on the truth that both the United States' capitalist dreams and Lee's story of Southern life are founded on stolen land and forged through genocide. Scout roots her family's history on this stolen land, taking care to note their racial, religious and class background. "Being Southerners," she explains "it was a source of shame to some members of the family that we had no recorded ancestors on either side of the Battle of the Hastings" (4). The embarrassment that the Finches cannot claim tenth-century blood from either the Anglo-Saxons or Normans is assuaged by the fortune established by their Methodist ancestor Simon Finch. While this narrative falls short of what Scout poses as Southern perfection, it certainly conforms to the cultural narrative of the American dream as Simon escapes from the poverty and persecution of England to make a lucrative life for himself in America where he "lived to an impressive age and died rich" (4).

Just as Scout names and trivializes the Creek people, she almost avoids mentioning the people her family enslaved. Scout makes a single mention of those whose labor built the Finch fortune; she explains, "Simon, having forgotten his teacher's dictum on the possession of human chattels, bought three slaves and with their aid established a homestead on the banks of the Alabama River" (4). In this way, Lee dispatches with the issue of slavery in the first chapter, and only mentions the word once more in the entire novel when she describes

the etymology of the First Purchase African M.E. Church. Scout recognizes that the sin of slavery is part of her family's history, but she easily dismisses it as a lapse in her ancestor's memory of Christian teachings. While she acknowledges the slaves "aid" in founding the Finch "homestead," she claims that her family "ma[de] their living from cotton," a phrase that incorporates slave labor into the product it produces (4). When Scout visits Aunt Alexandra at Finch Landing, she includes the enslaved people in her physical description: "beyond the bluff, were traces of an old cotton landing, where Finch Negroes had loaded bales and produce, unloaded blocks of ice, flour and sugar, farm equipment, and feminine apparel" (91). While slavery is part of the history of her family and her home, Scout makes as little mention of it as possible.

The repression of slavery in Scout's account of history becomes even more glaring as it becomes clear that what she calls "the disturbance between the North and the South" shapes the way she evaluates characters and events (4). Scout's classmates are skeptical of their new teacher because she came from Winston County, a characteristic the class perceives as a warning sign because, as Scout explains parenthetically to her readers, "[w]hen Alabama seceded from the Union on January 11, 1861, Winston County seceded from Alabama, and every child in Maycomb County knew it" (18). While most of the students failed first grade the previous year, they all know this detail of their Civil War history. Lee's choice to mark the fact parenthetically suggests that readers should accept it, too, and, by extension, the warning Scout derives from it. Further, when Atticus tells Scout that he'll probably lose Tom Robinson's case "[s]imply because we were licked a hundred years before we started," Scout immediately thinks of their relative "Cousin Ike Finch [who] was Maycomb County's sole surviving Confederate veteran" (87). Scout's connection does not demonstrate an

awareness that Jim Crow racism stems from failed reconstruction, but because Atticus's attitude reminds her of Cousin Ike saying "the Missouri Compromise was what licked us, but if I had to go through it agin I'd walk every step of the way there an' every step back jist like I did before an' furthermore we'd whip 'em this time…" (87). In Scout's mind, Atticus's decision to defend Tom Robinson is as hopeless, yet as honorable as Ike's commitment to the Confederate cause. How one behaved during the Civil War seems to be a rubric Scout uses to judge behavior in the present. Her schoolteacher's ancestors abandoned Alabama, so she's hesitant to accept the teacher. Atticus's courage in the face of sure defeat, on the other hand, is as impressive as her cousin fighting for a lost cause.

Scout's simultaneous repression of the history of slavery and valorization of the Confederacy as an ethical standard is as important as it is ironic. On the one hand, we might not expect a narrative advocating for fair treatment of African Americans to simultaneously laud Confederate values. What Scout calls "the possession of human chattel" was central to the South's antebellum economy and social structure (4). The failed reconstruction that followed the war not only facilitated the rise of lynchings, but also laid the legal groundwork for the sort of Jim Crow policies that foreclose fair trials. On the other hand, Lee's desire to uphold the Southern gentry as good Christians and moral citizens requires that she disconnect their values from the stereotype of white supremacy. Refusing to acknowledge how the legacy of slavery caused the conflict of her novel, allows Lee to make Atticus's cause and values seem connected to Cousin Ike's. Even as we have to fill in for Scout in terms of individual Theory of Mind, social mindreading, and cultural narratives, we rely on her for the plot of the novel, which we get steeped in Southern pride. This helps Lee to shift the cultural

narrative surrounding lynching and craft a model for a white man who is not prejudiced against Black people.

To Kill A Mockingbird is the aesthetic object that broke the interclass solidarity that made lynchings possible and prevalent for the hundred years after the civil war. Because of *Mockingbird* and related anti-lynching rhetoric, the United States's cultural memory may want to forget a time in which lynch mobs included and depended on the active participation of the South's "best citizens," a fact activist journalist Ida B. Wells often cites from contemporary newspapers in her anti-lynching pamphlets (125). We may prefer to believe, as Atticus explains to Jem, that "whenever a white man does that [lynches? or sentences to death?] to a black man, no matter who he is, how rich he is, or how fine a family he comes from, that white man is trash" (252). Lest we think that Lee uses Attics to forge a new understanding for the term "trash," we might remember the Economics 101 Jem offers to Scout at the end of the same chapter. Jem explains, "[t]here's four kinds of folk in the world. There's the ordinary kind like us and the neighbors, there's the kind like the Cunninghams out in the woods, and the kind like the Ewells down at the dump, and the Negros" (258). As Scout and Jem well know, the only "kind[] of folk" horrible enough to enact extralegal violence are "Ewells down at the dump" and, as they learn through the trial, the only "kind" ignorant enough (whose families haven't been "readin' and writin'" as long as the Finches) to convict an innocent man in court are the "kind like the Cunninghams out in the woods" (258). The constituency that Jem and Scout identify as the "kind of people" Aunt Alexandra, at least, considers "trash" is, in a telling instance of historical transcendence, the same that many blame for electing Trump (256). Lee inscribes her classist analysis into the very

landscape of Maycomb County in the well-worn metonymy that's part of common parlance. The Ewells, literally live in the dump. Scout describes, the Ewell homestead

> Maycomb's Ewells lived behind the town garbage dump in what was once a Negro cabin.… Its windows were merely open spaces in the walls, which in the summertime were covered with greasy strips of cheesecloth to keep out the varmints that feasted on Maycomb's refuse.
>
> The varmints had a lean time of it, for the Ewells gave the dump a thorough tough gleaning every day, and the fruits of their industry (those that were not eaten) made the plot of ground around the cabin look like the playhouse of an insane child" (citation). The walls of the Ewell house offer only a preamble boundary between their home and the dump itself and like scavenging rodents, the Ewell's create their home out of whatever they can find. (193-194)

Just as the epithet trash conflates people with society's refuse, Lee describes the Ewell homestead as part of the town dump. Lee's work is the opposite of Morrison's; while Morrison mounts a specific case for the particular life experiences of Cholly and Pauline, Lee lumps the Ewell's in a broad category—a "kind of people." The synecdoche that collapses the characters into the place is a similar gesture to the way she described "Finch Negroes" as part of the physical landscape of Finch Landing. The Ewells, in Lee's description, are more varmint-like than the rodents themselves. Just as in Ako-Adjei's critique, Lee positions Atticus as a white savior and casts the poorest white characters as the ultimate racists. As Teresa Godwin Phelps argues *Mockingbird* "teaches us to desire to be like Atticus—courageous in the face of our community's prejudices. But it also teaches us to fear and deplore the Ewells and Lula. The book shapes what we see and that to which we aspire, and

it leaves Lula and the Ewells marginalized" (529-531). Lula belongs in the same textual margin for Phelps because she does not welcome the Finch children to the Black church.

But it has not always been this way— for a long time, donning the white pillowcase so often associated with this extralegal violence, had been understood as an aristocratic gesture, in defense of the white womanhood, made by white elites and yeomen alike. In fact, this interclass complicity is precisely what made lynch law possible. Although "the coroner's inevitable verdict" as Dray points out attributed the crime to "the hands of persons unknown," members from every level of the white community would participate in the lynch mob (ix). In *The Tragedy of Lynching* (1933), one of the earliest sociological monographs on the subject, Arthur Raper explains "[l]ynchings tend to minimize social and class distinctions between white plantation owners and white tenants" (cited from Tolnay and Beck 123). The cross-class white complicity not only made this extralegal violence pragmatically possible, but also affirmed the end-goal of white supremacy. In *Rough Justice* (2004), Michael Pfeifer writes, "broad sectors of the population, tied together by racist ideology or common residence in a neighborhood, united in lynching. For instance, in areas of the Cotton Belt South, including the Red River and Ouachita River valleys of northern Louisiana, white planters and small farmers often united in vivid extralegal demonstrations of the consequences of defying white supremacy" (50).

Historical accounts are not alone in documenting the cross-class collaboration that facilitated the defense of white supremacy in the name of white women—national cinema celebrated this complicity as well. In D.W. Giffith's *The Birth of the Nation* (1915), Southern elites form the Klan to defend the Aryan race, and are even protected by former members of the Union army. As Wood points out, the film crosscuts between scenes of a

KKK 'trial' and a dying white woman, mirroring for a less critical purpose the causal relation established in Jean Toomer's "Portrait in Georgia."[63] *The Birth of the Nation* is credited not only with being the first full length motion picture showed at the white house but also the rallying cry for the resurgence of the Klan. Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* (1936) traffics with the same cultural narrative. Both the wildly popular novel and film adaptation, which premiered in 1939 the decade that Lee set her novel, continue to influence the American imaginary. Mitchell activates her lynch mob by confronting Scarlett with a multiracial team comprised of bandits, a white man and Black man unite in their common need for money. True to her craft of racist caricature, Mitchell depicts the black limbs moving only at the direction of the white mind: "'Shut her up! Drag her out!' cried the white man, and the black hand fumbled across Scarlett's face to her mouth" (547). Although Scarlett escapes with her purse and virtue as unscathed as they were before, the moneyed men in her life set aside their political differences to avenge this aggression. Ashley, the frail relic of the Old South and Frank Kennedy, Scarlett's store-owning stand-in husband convene the old gentry to ride through the night, murder the aggressors, and raze the shantytown where they lived. Rhett Butler, who models the modern man and new money, orchestrates the alibies, choreographs the corpses, and orders the burning of the robes (although, to his

[63] Wood explains, "[t]hrough parallel editing, Griffith could thus represent, in place of the actual lynching, the image of wronged white womanhood that, according to lynching rhetoric, dominated the imaginations of lynching participants as they tortured and hanged their victims. The suffering of the black man's body is literally replaced, in this instance, with that of the lifeless white woman" (157).

credit, he does chastise Scarlett for causing her husband's death). In Mitchell's novel, the upper classes conspire across political divides to defend Scarlett against a perceived threat that is as much raced as classed.

Wood locates the shift of attributing racist violence to classed chivalry to "out in the woods" poor whites in the 1930s, the decade *Mockingbird* takes place. Her monograph traces the way the spectacle aspects of lynching, which once shored up the myth of extralegal justice, became evidence of a despicable practice through the 1930s. She writes,

> Lynching spectacles, which had once served to substantiate and normalize white claims to moral superiority, now served as documentary and incontrovertible evidence of just the opposite…. To view a lynching spectacle was to witness—to bear witness to—a most deplorable act of moral barbarism; any other response to the sight soon became unimaginable. Once white elite and middle-class southerners began to perceive lynching in this way, the white solidarity that lynching was meant to enact showed signs of fissure. (262)

While the fissure Wood describes began in the 1930s, especially in political and activist discourses, the breach became complete after *Mockingbird*'s publication in 1960. After Lee's narrative, what Ida B. Wells always knew was a "threadbare lie" had become part of the cultural narrative we tell about lynching. Now, when we remember that shameful ritual, we imagine, in both fact and fiction, that the mob is comprised of poor people, like Mr. Ewell from the dump, and Mr. Cunningham when he forgets himself.

Mockingbird has made a decided shift in the cultural narrative around lynching and racism in general. Lee not only created an aspirational figure for hopeful white liberals to

attach to, but she relegated the evils of racism to white "trash." As Colin D. Pearce writes, "*To Kill a Mockingbird* is the literary face that the South has turned toward the world since 1960" (268). This is an important feat given that the alternative might have been framed by the original rhetoric of George Wallace. Although Lee's amendments to the cultural narrative leave racial hierarchies intact and emphasize class divisions, she does foster a desire and create an imaginary role for someone to simultaneously be white and want equality before the law. But at what price? In her efforts to divorce the figure of the southern gentleman from racism, Lee shackles social change—even if "it's just a baby step" as Miss Maudie says— to the villanization of poor white people (246). While this may seem a step in the right direction, the way we still rely on this rhetorical strategy of blaming that same constituency for backwards political choices, such as the results of the 2016 election, sixty years after the publication of Lee's novel, shows that it's no step at all. Further, even as Lee strives to render extralegal violence as an irrational impulse and makes a compelling and memorable case for equality before the law, she sublimates the racist urge to murder to the state itself. Even after Atticus lost the case and became a hero, Lee has a prison guard shoot Tom Robinson seventeen times in eerie anticipation of the police and carceral violence that seems to escalate in the twenty-first century. The traditional strategies of Western justice are insufficient to effect social change.

THE ROUND HOUSE

> I knew the general location of the crime. But I didn't know the exact whereness of it. At that moment, a certainty entered. I knew. He had attacked her here. The old ceremonial place had told me—cried out to me in my mother's anguished voice, I now thought, and tears started into my eyes. I let

them flood down my cheeks. Nobody was there to see me so I did not even wipe them away. I stood there in the shadowed doorway thinking with my tears. Yes, tears can be thoughts, why not?

— Joe Coutts *The Round House* (60)

Erdrich engages Atticus's aphorism by naming *The Round House*'s white supremacist family for another breed of lighthearted songbirds, and, because the U.S. government refuses to see Linden Lark as guilty of raping Geraldine, his murder becomes a central desire of the novel's plot and poetics. Erdrich uses a child-narrator to lead readers towards a particular reading of this essential death. Just as Atticus couches the murder of a mockingbird in the language of sins, Joe, although not Catholic, begins to think of Linden's crime according to the doctrine of mortal sins that cry out to heaven for vengeance, but Joe, judge's son that he is, offers his opinion by replacing vengeance with justice: "Sins Crying Out to Heaven for Justice" (260). Unlike many of Erdrich's other novels such as the *Plague of Doves* where, as we'll see in the next chapter, "guilt and victim" get "mixed in the spring of our existence," *The Round House* paints good and evil in clear brushstrokes (243). Erdrich demonstrates Linden's depravity not only through the horrendous nature of his crimes (rape, murder, kidnapping, and extortion), but also in his own self-assessment as "one sick fuck" (161). In Erdrich's deft allusion to Lee, Linden becomes both the mad dog that must be shot to protect the community and Boo Radley who the U.S. law decides not to see.

Although Erdrich paints Linden as her particular villain, her novel takes as its subject the jurisdictional issues that make reservations targets for sexual predators. In an interview before the novel's release, Erdrich expressed her exigency that her novel "should be about the law, it should be about the complexity of this, but if I go around, say on a book tour, and

say 'I've just written a book about jurisdictional issues!' [audience laughs] Exactly. You need a thirteen-year-old boy—you need a thirteen-year-old-boy."[64] From the beginning, Erdrich wanted her novel to be about the law's failure to speak in cases of violence against women: the term jurisdiction, the political target of the novel, derives from the Latin *jūris*, genitive of *jūs* 'law' and *dictio*, the noun form of *dīcere* 'to say, declare' (OED). In order for Erdrich to speak what the law cannot, she turns to a thirteen-year-old boy, Joe Coutts, whose mother survives a crime the law cannot see before the novel begins. Like the other child-narrators, Joe's narration works because of a cognitive collaboration with the readers—we fill in what the child cannot understand, and, at the same time, we learn from and with the child to change the way we interpret the world. Erdrich situates Joe as the predominant narrator of a suspense plot, a generic choice that she makes to "hook you in, [so that] you want to read it, you want to know what happens, you want to solve."[65] As Joyce Carol Oates observes in her review of the novel, the "'suspense' is rather more theoretical than evident" (18). The question of "what happened" is only a mystery to the child-narrator because of his innocence and his mother's reserve. Until her significant testimony half way through the novel, Geraldine refuses to describe what she survived in an effort to protect both Joe and Mayla's child. While readers can imagine the crime that resists the child's registration, we join Joe in his naïve and devastated hope that his father Bazil, who as a tribal judge speaks for the law, can make the courts take the case. In Erdrich's novel, solving the crime becomes

[64] "Louise Erdrich: A Reading and a Conversation." *YouTube*, uploaded by Dartmouth, 11/13/2012.

[65] Ibid.

not about identifying the rapist or proving his guilt, but about getting the law to see him in the first place. The failure *The Round House* speaks is not *Mockingbird*'s "inevitable verdict," the racist refusal to speak the truth (*ver* is Latin for 'truth' and 'dict' derives from *dictum* for utterance, order, or saying), but rather a testament to U.S. law's structural, systematic, and historic inability to see and speak on its own injustice (OED). Joe's narration trains readers to read for the glaring areas where U.S. law and justice remain obdurately blind, but also, as many critics have pointed out, encourage us to advocate for actual legal change, such as the extension of Violence Against Women Act that extends tribal jurisdiction.

Even as readers learn from the child-narrator and his father about the exclusive sights of the justice system, we also become aware of broader modes of perception, of traditional ways of knowing, that expand the ways we imagine justice. Joe's openness to the communication of the round house, for instance, attunes readers to an interconnectedness between human actors and the world that Erdrich acknowledges throughout the novel. Joe's responsiveness to extrasensory knowledge lead him to important clues such as the gas can and Mayla's doll, but at the same time Joe's too late recognition of some signs—such as the spirit that visits him and Bugger Pourier's dream, result both in Cappy's death and the failure to find Mayla's body. The way Erdrich braids this openness to extrasensory knowledge with a consideration of Western jurisprudence both motivates readers to see the need to change current laws and attunes us to wider range of voices and ways of knowing. In particular, she sets "wiindigoo justice" alongside western justice and asks readers to adopt another way of reading those who "crave[] the flesh of others" that does not only apply to her novel's rapist

but also helps us think about sexual predators and serial killers in contemporary society (187, 214).

While Erdrich does dwell in the binary logic of western discourse in order to critique the justice system, critics that adopt this lens too fully miss important aspects of the novel. The courts refuse to hear Geraldine's case because they refuse to see the rapist, and some critics can't hear Geraldine's voice because she refuses to speak in the legal register. Julie Tharp shares the sentiment of many readers when she explains that "[t]he attack on her silences her, renders her voiceless" (29). It's true that Linden threatens to kill Mayla, his other victim, and her baby if Geraldine speaks; he sneers, "[y]ou are going to die but if you say one word even one word up in heaven after you are dead I will kill them both" (162). The very means through which we know this, however, belies Geraldine's silence; we learn of his threat through her own words and testimony. In fact, Geraldine speaks frequently even before this important account. Her first request in the hospital is to speak with Joe to assert a wellness the narrator doesn't believe: "I'm alright, Joe. Look at me. See?" (10). Geraldine converses with Joe about rotten milk; she laughs with her son about Bazil's performed culinary failures; and, she has long talks with Linda Lark, Linden's twin sister who had been adopted into the tribe as an infant. The silence that many readers attribute to Geraldine may stem from her divergence from her role as mother in the symbolic order, an interpretation Erdrich underscores by making food and sustenance the subject of many of Geraldine's conversations. Even after Bazil accidentally startles her into dropping the casserole, a shattering both of the dish and her efforts or pretense to be "alright," Geraldine still speaks. She uses her "before-mother" voice to admonish Joe not to go after the man who attacked her (89). Geraldine practices a strategic silence in the face of the law in order to protect children:

both her son and Mayla's baby. When Bazil tries to get Geraldine to tell what happened at the round house, she says "[l]et him go, Bazil. Then I'll talk to you" (151). Just as Mr. Cunningham deems the lynch script inappropriate for Scout, Geraldine does not want her son to hear the violence she endured. At the same time, she will not share what happened until she knows that Mayla's child is safe. Even when she does speak, the fact that the rapist put a bag over her head, prevents her from speaking in a way the courts can hear: she cannot identify where the crime occurred, so the authorities do not know which court should hear her case. Geraldine knows this at some level and puts a stop to her husband's legal inquiries at the beginning of her disclosure by admonishing her husband, "[g]et out of the courtroom, get the damn hell out" (160). Geraldine is silenced, but only in the specific register of western legal discourse. In all other registers, Geraldine's story, almost like *The Bluest Eye*, is spoken chorally. The harmony between Joe's older and younger self speaks what Geraldine survived so clearly that what happened is not tainted with the patriarchal doubt that too often shrouds rape cases. The round house speaks the crime it witnessed so the child can know what his aunt and father cannot communicate. Geraldine speaks her own story precisely at the center of the novel.

Joe's openness to extrasensory guidance and traditional knowledge attune readers to larger practices of justice. Erdrich does not figure this Indigenous approach in opposition to U.S. law, but rather as a broader mode that can improve western justice even as it exists outside of it. In this section's epigraph, the round house bears witness to Geraldine's injury in a way western courts can never conceive, but through that communication, Joe discovers the gas can, concrete, court-admissible evidence. When the boys learn from the police radio that the crime occurred at the round house, the place itself communicates to Joe what happened.

Joe arrives before his friends to discover that the police had already "minutely combed" the scene for physical evidence, but the thirteen-year-old is open to other kinds of truth (59). Joe remembers "[t]here was a moment of intense quiet. Then a low moan of air passed through the cracks in the silvery logs of the round house. I started with emotion. The grieving cry seemed emitted by the structure itself. The sound filled me and flooded me" (59). What begins as an observation of a natural scene—the calm before a breeze passes through old wood—becomes an important sign: the ceremonial place calls out to the child. The sound fills him with emotion, a type of knowledge. While Joe had understood the facts of the case on cognitive level "I knew the general location of the crime, but I didn't know the exact whereness of it," the round house phenomenologically completes his understanding "[a]t that moment, a certainty entered. I knew. He had attacked her here" (60). The round house communicates to Joe what his mother refused and his father and aunt failed to speak: "the old ceremonial place had told me—cried out to me in my mother's anguished voice, I now thought, and tears started into my eyes" (60). The sacred place remembers the crime that had been committed there and speaks it to the child in his own mother's voice. The pain the place shares with Joe, the emotion that fills him, becomes thoughts, and, in the next four paragraphs, he narrates the precise blocking of the attack and his mother's escape. Geraldine's eventual testimony will confirm and build on the understanding the round house imparts to Joe by adding Linden's other victim, Mayla Wolfskin, whose body is never found. In this early scene, Joe's new knowledge leads him to the gas can, a piece of physical evidence overlooked by the police. Importantly, the round house communicates to Joe what his family cannot in a way that he can hear: "I had now come to the understanding that my mother's attacker had also tried to set her on fire. Although this fact had been made plain, or

was at least implicit in Clemence's reaction at the hospital and my father's account of my mother's escape, my understanding had resisted" (62). Immolation resists comprehension. It is an awful form of annihilation that the child cannot know and those who care for him do not want him to have to. But the round house, the old spiritual center, remembers the desecration and speaks it, cries it, to the child.

Just as listening to the maternal voice opens us to an interpretative mode foreclosed by the paternal legal discourse, the voice of the round house attunes us to the breadth of Erdrich's aesthetics. Just as she can write mother's voice and the legal discourse that silences it, Erdrich's imagery invokes multiple interpretations that sit alongside even as they contradict each other. To begin with the title's image, many critics note that Linden's chose to violate Geraldine and Mayla at the round house in order to desecrate the sacred space as well as the women. As Jacob Bender and Lydia Maunz-Breese put it:

> The round house thus becomes a metonymic feminine body. In violating Geraldine within the precincts of the round house, Lark simultaneously profanes the sacred feminized body representative of the Ojibway tribe and culture. This is a rape not only of one woman but of an entire community. (145)

While this interpretation reflects Linden's intent and resonates with the Christian imagery that Erdrich incorporates throughout the novel, the way the round house remembers the crime and communicates it to the child in a way that he can understand also asserts an inviolability. The Indigenous ceremonial space can both survive and speak of atrocities in a way foreclosed in the Christian frame. Bender and Maunz-Breese's statement effaces Mayla who Linden rapes and murders, an act that both further desecrates the place, but also undermines

their emphasis on "one woman" representing the entire community. Erdrich's aesthetics traffic in the "both/ and;" the round house is both desecrated by Linden's violation and cannot be profaned. Further, as we have already begun to see, Erdrich adopts the western gender system that associates fatherhood and masculinity with the law and language and the mother and femininity with silence and feeling. In Bender and Maunz-Breese's passage, we can see how this gendered binary maps onto the western nation colonized people dichotomy. In their interpretation, Geraldine's body and the body of the round house, metonymically related, stand for all Ojibwe people. Other critics agree; Mary Paniccia Carden writes, "[p]ositioning Geraldine's rape as representative of 'most Indian rape cases' and Geraldine herself as representative of Ojibwe culture, the novel makes the unprosecuted rape a metaphor for a wider and more far-reaching crime, a crime as old as the earliest colonial enterprise in the New World" (110). Carden also overlooks Mayla in her claims about Geraldine's status as representative. Raping women is a central tool of colonialism and an important figure in settler poetics that Erdrich activates in her novel, but she doesn't leave it there. Even as Erdrich evokes with these tropes, she, like Morrison, works "to free up the language from its sometimes sinister, frequently lazy, almost always predictable employment of racially informed and determined chains" (Morrison xi).

The way Joe and the readers learn about traditional Annishinaabe justice belie the gender binaries foundational for western thought. While maternal care is important, Erdrich makes living in a good way the responsibility of all genders. As Cholly used Old Blue's stories to orient his moral compass in *The Bluest Eye*, Joe, and especially his father, use the content of Mooshum's stories as ancestral precedent. We learn about "wiindigoo justice" through the talking dreams of Joe's grandfather Mooshum and Joe's father helps us connect

these traditions with the conflict of the novel. The spirit of the last buffalo charges Nanapush, the protagonist of Mooshum's stories and recurring character in Erdrich's oeuvre, to build the round house. In the final installment of Mooshum's dream story, importantly titled "The Round House" we learn the explicit instructions the "old female buffalo" gave to Nanapush:

> The round house will be my body, the poles my ribs, the fire my heart. It will be the body of your mother and it must be respected the same way. As the mother is intent on her baby's life, so your people should think of their children.
>
> That is how it came about, said Mooshum, I was a young man when the people built it—they followed Nanapush's instructions. (215)

While the round house is, as the critics assert, built from the feminine body and requires a maternal care of the people, it is not exclusively female. Rather, a man received the initial instructions and the collective built that place. Even as Mooshum's story shares an Indigenous perspective on how to live, the words Erdrich uses echo the Christian sacrament of communion. Further, while the buffalo woman uses the figure of a mother as a model, she directs all the people to be good parents, to be "intent" on their children's lives. In her message, men and women alike pass down knowledge of wiindigoo justice. Unlike Western logic that renders women silent in the patriarchal discourse of the law, Annishinaabe justice, although modeled on maternal care, requires the participation of all genders. Further, this place built for people "to do things in a good way" cannot be undone or violated by a single man. Instead, just as Nanapush and the people built the ceremonial place to practice justice,

so too does Erdrich's novel, also called the round house, become a space where readers can join in the justice she imagines.

The traditional interpretive strategies that Erdrich weaves into *The Round House* become most compelling for critics and characters who want to forgive, excuse, and even congratulate Joe for murdering Linden Lark. In their efforts to explain and understand the vigilante murder that closes the novel's penultimate chapter, Jacob Bender and Lydia Maunz-Breese assert "the novel offers the possibility that the climactic murder of Linden can actually be interpreted as a legitimate form of redress through recourse to the Native legal system" (147). Joe's father makes this case to his son in a conversation that seems calculated to allow Joe to confess his crime to his parents, so they might share his guilt. Bazil explains to his son that he would defend Lark's murderer by "argue[ing] that Lark met the definition of a wiindigoo, and that with no other recourse, his killing fulfilled the requirements of a very old law" (306). Like Bender and Maunz Breese, Bazil turns to what he calls "traditional precedent" in a western way: the critics and the character use wiindigoo justice to justify past actions rather than compel future behavior (307). Although Joe feels sufficient compulsion to murder Lark his exigency stems more from the U.S. justice system's failures than from his ancestors' traditions; he explains "if they could prosecute Linden Lark, I would not have to lie about the ammunition or practice to do what someone had to do" (Erdrich 261).

Far from considering tribal precedent, Joe understands his obligation through U.S. law: "I was only thirteen and if I got caught I would only be subject to juvenile justice laws, not to mention there were clearly extenuating circumstances" (261). Joe frames his reluctant resolve to murder Linden in the legal language of his father and the manufactured maturity of a teenager more often used to excuse missing schoolwork. Importantly, Joe's mother evokes

the wiindigoo tradition not to avenge past crimes, but to prevent future ones. When she learns that Linden has set his sights on Sonja, she declares, "[i]t's something Daddy told me. A story about a wiindigoo. Lark's trying to eat us, Joe. I won't let him, she said. I will be the one to stop him" (248). While his mother's determination plays a major role in Joe's decision to kill Linden, the thirteen-year-old does not use the story of the wiindigoo to make sense of his choice. Instead, even as he pursues Catholicism as a failed ruse to get the priest to teach him how to shoot, Joe, as we have seen, adapts the Christian tradition in order to think of Linden's crime as a "Sin[] Crying Out to Heaven for Justice" (260). While the child approaches the revenge murder through the lens of Christian morality, the adult narrator educates readers about the tradition of the wiindigoo through Mooshum's dreams and waking stories, Geraldine's assessment of Linden's hunger, and Bazil's explicit declaration that the murder satisfies the intent of the traditional law. After his father's explanation, the adult narrator draws our attention to the distance between the wiindigoo interpretative lens and the thinking of his child-self, "it was beyond me at the time to think of Mooshum's sleeptalking as a reading of traditional case law" (307). In this distance between the adult and the child, Erdrich trains her readers in a wiindigoo hermeneutics that shifts the way we think about justice but does not map onto Western jurisprudence as neatly as the judge and critics may like.

As the older narrator points out at the end of Bazil's case for "traditional precedent," Mooshum's dreams offer the novel's paradigmatic definition of the wiindigoo figure. Like made-for-T.V.-specials, Mooshum gives his dreams in three episodes that are each a self-contained story and cohere into a larger narrative. Erdrich underscores the importance of these stories-within-the-story not only by narrating them in the sleep-talking-voice of the

local elder (Mooshum claims to be one hundred and twelve), but also by focalizing twelve-year-old Nanapush, whose adult self plays a major role across Erdrich's oeuvre in homage, as many critics have pointed out, to the Ojibwe trickster Nanabozho. Further, through these stories, Erdrich explains that Nanapush was charged to build the round house because "[w]iindigoo justice must be pursued with great care. A place should be built so that people could do things in a good way" (187). To emphasize the importance of this place and its purpose, Erdrich titles the final installment of Mooshum's dreams "The Round House." As if aware that the audience of his dreams are ignorant readers and children, Mooshum explains how people can go wiindigoo, "[s]ome people in hungry times became possessed. A wiindigoo could cast its spirit inside of a person. That person would become an animal, and see fellow humans as prey meat" (180). As Bender and Maunz-Breese note, Erdrich plays with the redness of Linden's lips describing them as both "thick, dark red, like he had a fever" and "thin and red" in the pages that frame Mooshum's dream as if his mouth were like the wiindigoo's "similarly bloody from constant chewing" (Erdrich 170, 210, Bender Maunz-Breese 153). The novel's sexual predator's mouth masticates with the figured blood of his victims.

Just as Joe sees no alternative to murder in stopping Linden's sexual hunger, Mooshum's dream stipulates that in the face of such cannibalistic hunger, "[t]he thing to do as you had to kill that person right away. But not before you had agreement in the matter" (180). The commitment to follow U.S. law prevents characters from publicly discussing how to deal with Linden as they may have in a traditional Anishinaabe society, so Joe and his best friend Cappy independently and in sworn secrecy decide to murder the predator. Joe's community does express unanimous endorsement by becoming accessories to the murder

after the fact. The child, not yet attuned to wiindigoo justice, does not fully feel the consensus that Erdrich has primed her readers to look for. Immediately after the murder, Joe's Uncle Whitey asks for Joe's shirt and directs both Joe and Cappy to touch the bottle they drank from. He keeps these things as evidence, so he can give the boys an alibi. Linda Lark comforts Joe by affirming "[t]wo and two makes three. However, I have decided that you are too young to have accomplished this. Maybe you're not, but I've decided you are" (Erdrich 298). Linda, like Whitey, shows solidarity with Joe and Cappy by participating in the cover-up of the murder. Linda finds the murder rifle, gets her adoptive brother to dismantle it, and disposes the parts in rivers, back roads, and sloughs. Even the sheriff shows his support for Joe by returning a jar Joe left at the crime scene to Joe's mother and asking her to make it into an ordinary object: to fill it with preserved pickles. Joe's parents participate in this after-the-fact consensus by explaining the tribal precedent to Joe. According to Mooshum's dream however, even after coming to consensus, only "someone in the blood family" could execute the decision (180). Linda, Linden's only surviving relative, had the opportunity to kill him by denying him her kidney, but misses this opportunity in an act of compassion. As if anticipating that his dreams might provide a future legal framework, Mooshum clarifies "[t]he cure for a wiindigoo was often simple: large quantities of hot soup" (214). While sustenance seems a logical remedy for cannibalism, Erdrich does not propose a corollary for sexual predation save Linda's generosity in gifting her own organ, an act of kindness that cannot cure Linden's carnivorous urges.

While Mooshum's dream delineates clear standards for dealing with wiindigoog (-g indicates the plural) that as many critics explain accord with traditional Annishinaabe justice, the story Mooshum dreams does not provide a good case law for Bazil's theoretical case.

While Mooshum's story, like Erdrich's novel, positions the adolescent child to protect and defend his mother, the status of the wiindigoo is different in each. Nanapush's father *falsely* accuses his mother of going wiindigoo. In Mooshum's dream, Nanapush's father wields the term as a way of removing a wife he "tired of," whereas in Erdrich's novel Linden really is possessed by that cannibalistic spirit (180). In fact, in the entire novel, there are no wiindigoog in the traditional sense that Mooshum reiterates in the final installment: "people who lost all human compunctions in hungry times and craved the flesh of others" (214). Instead, the characters that Erdrich depicts as ravenous for human flesh are not driven there by hunger, but by greed and entitlement. Mooshum's other wiindigoo story, one that he tells while awake, provides a more precise precedent for Linden. Unlike Nanapush's mother, this "white wiindigoo," a turn-of-the-century trapper known as Liver-Eating Johnson does "see fellow humans as prey meat" as Mooshum attests "that old rascal used to track down Indians and kill us and take and eat our livers" (180, 236). But Mooshum's anecdote diverges from the dream's criteria because lack of food did not cause Liver-Eating Johnson's cannibalism. Instead, in Erdrich's careful prose, the trapper's very profession in concert with the settler-state's laws caused the hunger of the Native people. The second part of Mooshum's dream opens with the connection between colonization and starvation: "[a]h, those first reservation years, when they squeezed us! Down to only a few square miles. We starved while the cows of settlers lived fat off the fenced grass of our old hunting grounds. In those first years our white father with the big belly ate ten ducks for dinner and didn't even send us the feet" (184). Erdrich makes clear that the extreme scarcity that starved Nanapush's father into falsely accusing his wife of going wiindigoo was a direct result of the U.S.'s settlement

policies.[66] The girth of U.S. national boundaries, the private property and pockets of its white citizens, and the belly of its president expand in direct proportion to the shrinking of Native hunting grounds and the forced starvation of Native peoples. Even in this era of extreme starvation, however, Erdrich does not depict any Native character as "crav[ing] the flesh of others," but rather it is the unjustified craving of settlers that causes the starvation in the first place (214). Further, categorizing Liver-Eater as a wiindigoo is not just an accurate assessment of his predatory behavior, but a rhetorical strategy that he himself embraces to explain the teeth he lost chewing through the rawhide bindings that Mooshum and others had used to trap the trapper. Mooshum explains that after his escape, Liver-Eater, "made up a story about eating the Indian's leg because unless he had a good story who'd believe a toothless cross-eyed old bugger?" (338) In this intersection, the figure of the wiindigoo becomes not only a way for Native storytelling to account for white greed, but also a name for a colonizing rhetoric through which settlers and supremacists can build ethos through the consumption of Native lands and bodies.

While the figure of a wiindigoo certainly works to help characters and critics forgive and commend Joe's crime, it is even more compelling as a way of reading and interpreting the ongoing cannibalistic project of settler-colonialism. Erdrich prepares readers for this interpretation both before readers learn about the wiindigoo and before Joe knows Linden is the one who attacked his mother. Throughout the novel, Erdrich has her characters adopt a language that not only categorizes Linden as evil, but also anticipates his death. Before Joe knows the rapist's identity, he overhears his father and uncle describe the attacker as a

[66] Joshua Miner also comments on this connection in "Consuming the Wiindiigo: Native Figurations of Hunger and Food Bureaucracy."

"damned carcass" (187). In the circular logic afforded to poetic language, by the end of the novel Linden will become what Joe's first referent for him figures. After Joe learns Linden's identity, he and Cappy adopt a Star Trekkian code to avoid the rapist's name as "the skin of evil," an allusion that also suggests a body already lacking a human soul (256). Further, Joe learns that Linden is *a* monster before he knows that Linden is *the* monster, and this is one of the ways Linden becomes a prime suspect for the readers before the child-narrator guesses his guilt. The second two fictional court cases Erdrich introduces in the novel deal with the Lark family. First, we learn that the Larks were convicted of overcharging Native people at their family run "gas and grocery business" (49). Joe initially believes that his father marked this case because his father succeeded in asserting tribal jurisdiction over non-Native people, signaling the importance of jurisdiction for the novel, but his father says he's more interested in "the people involved" (50). The Lark family, he explains, are "small-time hypocrites, who may in special cases be capable of monstrous acts if given the chance" (50). Their hypocrisy manifests itself not only in crimes against other races but also in violence in their own family. Bazil explains to his son: although "[s]hrill opponents of abortion," the Larks attempt to put to death and later abandon Linden's twin sister Linda because she was deformed at birth (Erdrich 50). As we learn in the novel's first story-within-the-story "Linda's Story," Linden already demonstrated the family trait of hate in utero where he crushes his twin sister Linda— an act she characterizes as compassion because her resulting deformity saves her from the Lark family who prides itself as having participated in the *Plague of Doves* lynching. The Wishkobs, an Ojibwe family, rescue Linda from both death and being raised racist by adopting her into the tribe. Linden inherited his aggressive

impulse as one would a genetic disease or white privilege—the hatred he's predisposed to feel gets cultivated in the home. Linda explains how her birth mother must have felt:

> She would have to have turned her fury at herself, her shame, on someone else—the child she'd chosen. She'd have blamed Linden, transferred her warped hatreds to him. I had felt the contempt and triumph in her touch. I was thankful for the way things had turned out. Before we were born, my twin had the compassion to crush against me, to perfect me by deforming me, so that I would be the one who was spared. (123)

While Linda's adoptive family teach her empathy and love, Linden learns greed, a sense of entitlement, and hatred from his birth parents. In the subsequent case that Bazil reviews with Joe, the Larks try and fail to use a now-adult Linda to gain control of the Wishkob's allotment land. In response, the Wishkobs organize a boycott of the Larks' store and help Joe's Uncle Whitey establish his gas station, which eventually puts the Larks out of business. Joe's father connects to Linden: "He blames the Wishkobs, his sister, Linda, Whitey and Sonja, and the judge in this case, me, for her death and his near bankruptcy, which now seems inevitable" (52). Linden's upbringing disfigures his psyche to the point where, as Erdrich says in an interview, "he has simply no human empathy."

While Erdrich bases her figure on traditional ways of dealing with those who turn to cannibalism in times of hunger, her version of wiindigoo better diagnoses the particular psychoses of entitled white men who believe themselves to be disenfranchised in an era that is beginning to recognize the harms of colonization and white supremacy. Joshua Miner argues that Erdrich, like some other contemporary Native writers, mobalize wiindigoo

imagery to critique settler-colonialisim.[67] Linden's craving, like Liver-Eater's, does not stem from actual hunger or need but rather manifests itself in the major modes through which white men historically sought to establish their power—by possessing and controlling bodies of women and people of color, bodies these men conceptualized as things or land to be violated and turned into money. Although we don't know Linden is the attacker when Geraldine shares her story, his rant reveals his belief in his entitlement to women's bodies. He blames Mayla for having another man's baby and argues it is her fault he has raped and plans to kill the women. Later in that scene Linden's tirade reveals an awareness of his own mental instability and sadism; Geraldine explains, "[h]e rose and kicked me and went over and kicked her [Mayla] so hard she wheezed. Then he bent over and looked into my face. He said to me, I'm sorry. I might be having an episode. I'm not really a bad person. I didn't hurt you, did I?" (Erdrich 162) Rather than seeing Geraldine as representative of all Indigenous women as some critics suggested above, we can see Linden as representative of a too-often anonymous group of sexual predators. Erdrich assertion in the novel's "Afterword" that "86 percent of rapes and sexual assaults upon Native women are perpetrated by white men" situates Linden as emblematic of this pervasive problem (319). Further, Erdrich casts Linden not only as a rapist, but also a murderer; he kills Mayla Wolfskin, and although Joe learns

[67] In his nuanced discussion of Erdrich and Stephen Graham Jones, Miner argues, "wiindigoo poetics, having emerged in response to corrupt settler-bureaucratic and neocolonial appetites, expresses agency against all vectors of the Eurowestern rationalization of Indigenous ecologies and food cultures" (248).

through Bugger Pourier's dream that Linden buried her at the construction site, her body is never found.

The way Erdrich's version of the wiindigoo connects sexual predation and murderous greed to settler-colonialism creates a lens through which we can better understand violence that post-dates her novel. The figure of wiindigoo becomes incisive political commentary in the wake of mentally disturbed mass-murderers in Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, California, South Carolina, Oregon, Nevada, Florida, Texas, and Toronto.[68] Elliot Rodger, the example closest to our community at UCSB, murdered six people in the student

[68] In 2011, Jared Loughner shot thirteen people killing six in an attack targeted on Tucson Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords. In 2012, James Holmes opened fire at a batman movie in Aurora Colorado killing twelve people and injuring seventy more. In the same year, Adam Lanza murdered twenty-seven teachers and students at Sandy Hook Elementary school after killing his mother and before killing himself. In 2015, Dylan Roof killed nine African American people at an Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina; and Chris Harper-Mercer shot nine people at his community college in Roseburg, Oregon. In 2017, Stephen Paddock murdered fifty-eight people at a music festival in Las Vegas, Nevada and Devin Patrick Kelley murdered twenty-six people in a Baptist Church outside San Antonio, Texas. In 2018, Nikolas Cruz killed seventeen people at Majority Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida; Dimitrios Pagourtzis killed ten people at Santa Fe High School outside Houston, Texas; and Alek Minassian murdered ten people with a van in Toronto. Loughner, Holmes, Roof are serving life sentences. Lanza, Harper-Mercer, Paddock, Patrick Kelley took their own lives or were killed by police during their attacks. Cruz, Pagourtzis and Minassian are being tried.

residential area adjacent to campus before taking his own life in 2014. Just as Linden felt his thwarted entitlement to Mayla's body reason enough to kidnap, rape, and murder her, Elliot Rodger explained his rampage in his Youtube video and manifesto as "retribution" against a society that frustrated his sexual desires. While Linden concentrated his racism and sexism on the women he attacked, Elliot Rodger preceded his attack on the sorority by stabbing his Chinese American roommates and their friend. All of the killers responsible for the massacres listed above expressed white supremacist or misogynist sentiments before their attacks or were reported as being abusive towards women by those close to them afterward. Some of these later murderers even modeled their violence after the Isla Vista tragedy; on Facebook, the Toronto killer claimed his attack shared the same goals as "Supreme Gentleman Elliot Rodger" (BBC). According to BBC, Elliot Rodger "has been virtually canonised by some fringe communities online" such as "[a]n online community known as the "involuntarily celibate", or incels, who blame women for their sexual failings" (BBC). While it was the justice system that refused to see Linden's guilt in Erdrich's novel, the executive branch failed to see Elliot Rodger's murderous intent. According to the *Washington Post*, the sheriff's officers who visited the Isla Vista killer at the warning of this therapist and mother, found him "quiet and timid . . . polite and courteous" according to Santa Barbara Sherriff Bill Brown. The police and FBI were also warned or even encountered the other murderers before their attacks, but failed to read them as threatening and prevent their attacks.

While the idea of wiindigoo justice might be the most explicit "traditional precedent" Erdrich raises in *The Round House*, after finishing the novel we can see that she has been inviting us all along to adopt broader interpretive strategies. We have already seen how Joe's openness to extra-sensory communication allows him to hear what his mother endured from

the place that witnessed it. By the end of the novel, we also know that the vision that appeared to Randall and the "ghost" that visits Joe was a spirit from the future trying to prevent Cappy's death. Although the same parental figures that teach Joe about the wiindigoo push him to consider the vision as a real helper, Joe does not follow that interpretive lines as thoroughly as he considers the court's failures to hear his mother's case. When he first mentions the ghost to his father, he accepts Bazil's assertion that "sometimes a ghost is a person out of your future. A person dropping back through time, I guess, by mistake," but Joe refuses the ghost's knowledge "[t]he last thing I want to know is something that a ghost wants to tell me" (82). While Joe believes his father enough to seek Mooshum's advice he still thinks that the sprit has something to do with the past crime, rather than future aid. Mooshum clarifies that it's not a ghost, but a benevolent spirit: "[w]hen somebody throws their spirit at you they don't even know it, but they mean to help" (133). In addition to voicing the truth of spirits through the mouth of the judge and elder, Erdrich helps her readers believe what Joe doesn't fully explain by having this path reveal real clues. The "doodem" or clan animal that Mooshum advises Joe to follow does lead him to Mayla's doll in the lake, but rather than offering the doll to the authorities as evidence, Joe brings it to Sonja who helps him deposit the forty thousand dollars they find inside.

While the visions portend what will happen to Cappy, the doll becomes a clue in the mystery of what happened to Mayla. In reader's minds, the discovered doll connects to the rumor Bazil shares about Governor Yetlow's odd attempts to adopt an Indian child whose mother has disappeared and the detail that Geraldine discloses about Linden's anger at Mayla not only for having another man's child, but also hiding a large sum of money that man paid her. We can conclude that the governor, guilty of statutory rape, paid Mayla not to press

charges in the court or papers. Although Joe understands this at some level, he's too "poison[ed]" by hearing what happened to his mother to follow this other thread. He does know that finding Mayla's body will be the *habeas corpus* the government demands to prosecute Linden, but, having never met her, he does not feel the personal connection and imperative to open himself up to hearing her story. As readers connect the clues Joe learns from dreams and ghosts to the evidence he collects through Western means, we begin to adopt a more holistic hermeneutic strategy. If we fully embrace what places remember, readers can attune ourselves to knowledge that Joe himself misses. Erdrich makes Joe feel his guilt and anxiety about Mayla when he's near the place Linden buried her body. While Joe is biking with his friends, he remembers particular thoughts surfacing:

> Into my mind there came the picture of that scrap of blue-and-white checked cloth, and the knowledge I kept pushing away about the doll being in that car. By throwing out the doll I'd obviously destroyed evidence, maybe even something that would tell Mayla's whereabouts. Where she lay, in a place so obscure that even the dogs could not find her. I put the thought of Mayla from my mind. And Sonja. I tried also not to think of my mother. Of what had maybe happened in Bismarck. All of these thoughts were reasons I did not want to go home, or to be alone. They came up over me, shrouding my mind, covering my heart. Even as I rode, I tried to get rid of the thoughts by taking my bicycle over the dirt hills behind the hospital. I began to course violently up and down, jumping so high that when I landed my bones jarred. Whirling. Skidding. Raising clouds of grit that filled my mouth until I was sick and thirsty and dripping with sweat so I could finally go home. (225-226)

Unlike Joe's experience at the round house, when he was looking for clues, at the construction site, he does not consider that his feelings may be thoughts too. In both locations, however, Erdrich has the place communicate accurate information to Joe about what had occurred there in the past. Although he thinks of Mayla as he bikes back and forth over the place where her body is hidden, he does not open himself to considering that the place may be communicating to him they way the round house had. Instead, he "push[es] away" that knowledge and "tri[es] to get rid" of those thoughts. Joe, raised in a world that values objective truth and concerned over his mother's fate, cannot receive the knowledge of the place even though the thoughts "came up over me, shrouding my mind, covering my heart" (226). Instead, the thirteen-year-old finally learns this painful fact from asking Bugger about a dream Joe ignored earlier in the novel:

> He kept crying about her. He mumbled about construction and I knew. She was in the construction site, the earth mounded over her. I couldn't help the picture from forming. Us jumping our bikes, flying back and forth, and her below. I stood up, jolted. I knew, down to the core of me, that he had seen Mayla Wolfskin. He had seen her dead body. If we hadn't killed Lark, he'd have gone to jail for life anyway. (310)

By the end of the novel, Joe understands that he should attend more to extrasensory forms of knowledge. Erdrich pushes readers to do the same by expecting readers to believe Joe's "core" knowledge without offering any corroborating western style evidence. Just as opening himself up to the spirit may have saved Cappy, listening to Bugger's dream may have helped him bring Linden to justice for both rape and murder.

Erdrich's aesthetic adaptation of traditional forms of justice and extrasensory modes of communication asks us to read as connected what western strategies of sense-making see as isolated, unrelated, and separate, but she does not ask us to reject the U.S. justice system entirely. Instead, her novel argues that Anishinaabe ways of knowing can provide a supplement (if a supplement can be broader and more expansive than that which is supplements) to Western epistemology. While the U.S. justice system creates strict limits and careful categories about the *particular* people who can be tried for *particular* crimes in *particular* cases based on *particular* evidence, traditional systems of justice make connections across those limited boundaries. In *The Round House*, the scene of the crime itself becomes a place that can speak and testify. Those who were not there, like Joe, might become the best witnesses. Further, both the spirit visitors and the figure of the wiindigoo indicate that Annishinaabe justice can look into the future as well as the past. Joe's father already understands how wiindigoo justice might serve as traditional precedent and attempts to use it to absolve Joe of his crime. The stories Mooshum tells, however, push readers to see the proscriptive, preventative nature of this justice—the wiindigoo must be killed before it starts consuming human flesh. Thus, while the U.S. Justice system speaks in a rhetoric that Aristotle would classify as "forensic speech" because "[t]he party in a case at law is concerned with the past; one man accuses the other, and the other defends himself, with reference to things already done." In Erdrich's novel, Annishinaabe justice faces forward as well as backward. The police officer unwittingly threw his spirit from the future to warn Joe about the impending accident. In Erdrich's novel, this interconnection across space and time is always present whether characters are aware of it or not as Joe's thoughts about Mayla while he's biking at the construction site indicate. By the end of the novel, it's clear that

opening oneself to this hermeneutic model is as important if not more so than understanding the limited sights of the U.S. justice system. After Joe hears Mooshum dream the story of the round house, the place built so the people could practice justice in a good way, he reflects, "I lay awake thinking of the place on the hill, the holy wind in the grass, and how the structure had cried out to me. I could see a part of something larger, an idea, a truth, but just a fragment. I could not see the whole, but just a shadow of that way of life" (214). In his grandfather's dream, Joe can see a different way of life, one that embraces broader modes of interconnection and understanding. In Erdrich's novel, we can also see the "shadow of that way of life," and like the ceremonial place her characters built to practice justice, the pages of her story become a place where readers can imagine another kind of justice as well.

CONCLUSION

As children, Scout, Claudia, and Joe do not initially understand the full weight of the crimes they narrate. By balancing the narration between the naïve voice of the child and particular hermeneutic strategies, Lee, Morrison, and Erdrich invite readers to both fill in what the child doesn't know and adopt a new interpretive strategy. Lee requires that readers supplement Scout's story with our own understanding of the history of lynching in the United States, and, at the same time, she has Scout include small lessons in Southern pride. In this way, she breaks the white consensus that made lynch law possible and positions the Ewells as a "kind" of people responsible for racism. Morrison makes her readers register the meaning of a daughter having her father's baby before her young narrators do. At the same time, the omniscient sections make Cholly's a particular, rather than representative, case that sheds light on the power dynamics that render the bodies of Black women and girls vulnerable to sexual violence. In *The Bluest Eye*, we have to condemn the father's violence,

but also understand how it came to happen. Finally, in *The Round House*, Erdrich proposes wiindigoo hermeneutics as an important way of reading white predatory violence. Rather than targeting people for their race or class, this lens makes visible people whose aggression stems from a sense of entitlement and greed. Instead of punishing people after the fact, this interpretive strategy asks us to seek ways to prevent sexual violence.

While *Mockingbird* stages the primary sense associated with empathy—sight, standing in someone's shoes or on their front porch, *The Bluest Eye* and *The Round House* offer an important supplement—sound, hearing someone else's song or story or even the memories spoken by a place. Looking at the world from a perspective not one's own is an important strategy for understanding others, but sound offers a more robust and mature additional layer. While our eyes can only focus on one thing at a time, we can hear multiple, different melodies and appreciate the harmony between them. In *The Bluest Eye* for instance we can hear what happened to Pecola, condemn Cholly for it, and, at the same time, hold in our mind the experiences that led him to become so violent. While child-narrators rely heavily on the empathy made possible by sight—we experience the story from their naïve eyes, as we will see in the following chapter, the braided narrative makes the ethical harmony afforded by sound a formal quality of the novel.

CHAPTER FIVE: "THERE IS NO UNRAVELING THE ROPE": THE ETHICS OF BRAIDED NARRATIVES

PRELUDE

The first sentence of Louise Erdrich's *The Plague of Doves* (2008) opens with a child's call: "[t]he gun jammed on the last shot and the baby stood holding the crib rail, eyes wild, bawling" (1). The novel begins *in medias res* of what we later learn is the mass murder of five members of a North Dakota settler family. In the opening paragraph, however, we only see the murderer, unmarked except by his gender and insanity, "set … on edge" by the wail of his would-be-last victim (1). The irritating quality of child's cry compels the adult to turn from his bloody work. Instead of finding another weapon to hurt the child, the murderer plays a record waiting on the gramophone. The "unearthly violin solo" not only hushes the infant, but also "made the man stop, the pieces of the gun in his hands" (1). He plays the solo three times putting the baby to sleep and calming himself, so he can fix his gun. These fragile recorded notes are but the first non-verbal sounds that force characters to stop, arrest them temporarily, and then call them to a different course of action. In this opening scene, the music pauses the murderer before he finishes his crime and that frail solo saves his last victim. But we don't know it then. Erdrich waits fifty pages, almost a fifth of the novel, to return to the scene of this crime. This single opening paragraph, titled "Solo," ends with a disconcerting ellipsis: "[h]e raised the gun. The odor of raw blood was all around him in the closed room" (1). Erdrich leaves us with the undetermined fate of the child, whose screams still echo in our ears, and the smell of blood as we turn the page and enter the eleven-year-old mind of character narrator, Evelina Coutts, whose worries about her grade school crushes and

fascination with her family's history seem unrelated to the initial unexplained violence. Four score pages later, Erdrich switches stories again, and then fifty pages after that she shifts narratives again. Why does Erdrich make such jarring narrative shifts? What purpose does the twining together of multiple narrative threads serve? What ethical affordances does this narrative structure offer?

Importantly, most of *The Plague of Doves*'s distinct narrative strands revolve around the central core of this opening crime and its false and violent vengeance. When Evelina's anecdotal narrative wends back to this opening murder, it comes as a story-within-a-story that Mooshum recounts to his granddaughter, our narrator. Mooshum remembers how the groaning of un-milked cows from the barn and the house's blood-smeared door announced to him and three friends the crime that had taken place there. Knowing that, as Native people in turn-of-the-century North Dakota, their guilt rather than their innocence will be assumed, the four men want to turn away from the horror of the house, but the cry of the cows arrests them: "[t]he desperation in their resonant bawls stopped the men in the trampled yard" (61). They cannot move because of the intense need evident in the sound of the animals' appeal. The men try to resist the bovine call and leave the terrible scene, but are stopped by the weak wailing of the human child. Just as the sound of the infant stops the murderer, so too does her cry prevent the men from passing the bloodstained farm. Erdrich snares the men with the vulnerability of two matched needs, both communicated clearly by non-verbal cries: the cows moan with the pain of the very milk the infant cries for. While the men might have resisted the plea of the cows, they cannot turn away from the child's call, and they satisfy both primal needs with one act. Although they knew that entering the house might cost them their life, the cry of a child resonates deeper than their own self-preservation and common

sense. White settlers later lynch these Métis and Ojibwe men in a raving and racist attempt at revenge— only Mooshum was cut down before he died. This double wound, the secret slaughter of a settler family and the public murder of innocent Native men, becomes the central core of *The Plague of Doves*.

But Erdrich does not allow these two crazed acts of violence to frame the ethical power of her child's call in her narrative, as they seem to in the story. Erdrich represents the way a child's cry can compel both murderers and bystanders with a claim that undermines both a killer's fury and four men's better-judgment. But she doesn't let the child's satisfaction satiate her readers in either case. Instead, she separates the single omniscient paragraph where we witness the murderer at the climax of his crime from the telling of story of the rescue and vigilante revenge by fifty pages, two narrators, and half a century. Although the men respond to the child's cry almost immediately in story time, readers must wait, remembering the desperate vulnerability of the infant in the opening scene as we shift our attention to Evelina's adolescent anxieties. The distance between the baby's wild wail in the novel's opening line and the eventual care she receives from the passing Native men troubles readers not only with the mystery of the crime but also with the primal yearning for someone hold the infant as we can only hold the book. When Erdrich finally allows characters to respond to this instinctual desire, we read it filtered through an historical rubric of race that renders this basic gesture of care into a death sentence signed by the contagion of vigilante mobs that haunt the birth of the nation. What first seemed a basic response, known across species—to hold a crying child—now seems an untenable risk because of the particular psychoses of human settlers. The space between the diegetic opening and the recounted story of response not only complicates this scene of care with the sins of the imagined

national community that we share with Erdrich and her characters, but also with the relationships among her imagined characters' stories. While we witness the opening crime through the detached lens of an omniscient third person, we read the story of the response filtered through the minds of both a child and her grandfather Mooshum who himself experienced the horror of the events. Mooshum's narrative alerts us to the ethical anguish of experiencing such events, the phenomenological embeddedness of hearing the baby cry "as if it knew they were out there," an acknowledgement of their presence and potential to respond that precedes their relationship (62).[69] Evelina's response to Mooshum's testimony, as both our narrator and Mooshum's narratee, registers for readers the relational implications of hearing such a story.[70] Evelina writes, "[t]he story Mooshum told us had its repercussions—the first being that I could not look at anyone in quite the same way anymore" (86). The story's ramifications are ethical in the sense that they both attune Evelina to the relational complexities of her community and give her a moral rubric— however cloudy— with which to evaluate the other characters. In a fitting description of the cognitive work readers need to do to keep track of the many characters in Erdrich's novel, Evelina writes that after hearing

[69] That the infant calls to the adult before seeing, hearing, or knowing the adult inverts Walter Benjamin's formulation: "[b]y giving names, parents dedicate their children to God; the names they give do not correspond—in a metaphysical rather than etymological sense—to any knowledge, for they name newborn children" (69).

[70] In *Vehement Passions* (2002), as we have seen, Philip Fisher writes, "an author often sets between us and a report a figure we can call the 'register,' whose response models our response" (145).

the story, she "traced the blood history of the murders through my classmates and friends until I could draw out elaborate spider webs of lines and intersecting circles" (86).

The Plague of Doves forces readers to attend simultaneously both to the vivid particularity of individual stories, such as the opening violence and later Evelina's discovery of it, and also to the broader formal structure of the novel itself comprised, as it is, from braided narrative strands. In so doing, *The Plague of Doves* grapples with both the poignant fissure that separates us from those with whom we are most intimate and that chasm that historical violences carve between social groups. The jarring distance in discourse time and surprising shift in narrative perspective between the novel's opening cry and the telling of the response formally affirms the novel's concern with the ethical murkiness of human attachment in a world clouded by social antagonisms. But Erdrich does not only make this split between the opening "Solo" and her first narrator, Evelina; rather, she shifts narrators eight times, balancing the novel's progression among four character narrators and that eerie opening omniscience. Although Erdrich does not leave readers with the "odor of raw blood" in the subsequent transitions between narrators, the shift of both perspective and plot still jars, raising coherence challenges and ethical questions. Each time we turn the page to find ourselves at the mercy of another narrator— we not only wonder what their story will be, but also ask how it could possibly relate to the thread that came before. While Evelina seeks to trace the relationship of her contemporary community to the vigilante violence half a century prior, other narrators seem unconcerned about the crime. Antone Bazil Coutts, an unnamed suitor in Evelina's section, narrates his courtship of Geraldine and focalizes a few other characters' stories. Marn Wolde, the first white narrator, tells of her marriage to and murder of cult leader Billy Peace, a descendent of one of the lynching's victims, and Cordelia

Lochren, the sole survivor of the crime closes the novel some seventy or eighty years after it began. Although the murder is not the first event chronologically in the novel, it is the first told, which as Peter Rabinowitz would point out, is a "privileged position" which signals to readers the interpretive importance of the event (58). Partly because of this convention privileging opening events and partly because of Evelina's interest, readers question the connection of new narrators to those early crimes. Erdrich cautions us, however, from using a black and white rubric of good and evil. Evelina writes, "I still loved Mooshum, of course, but with this tale something in my regard of him was disturbed, as if I'd stepped into a clear stream and silt had billowed up around my feet" (86).

The violent story of call and response, infant need and adult care, insane violence and crazed vengeance activated in the initial scene seems to fragment the constituent narrative threads, but also functions as a heuristic inviting readers to see a braid connecting the multiple stories. The first scene not only strikes the traditional opening of a whodunit plot and sounds the ethical cue of a crime in want of justice, but also introduces us to a first aesthetic that will tinge how we experience the future encounters of the novel.[71] Further, primed with Evelina's attention to the blood connection among her community—both in terms of heritage and guilt—we wonder what responsibility each new narrative will have to the opening violence. *The Plague of Doves* tackles both the "problem of other minds" and "the problem of the color line," the challenge of our most loved other, as in the painful tryst

[71] Christopher Bollas writes, "[t]he aesthetic experience is not something learned by the adult, but is an existential recollection of an experience where being handled by the maternal aesthetic made thinking irrelevant to survival" (43). Just as a person's first relationships shape her aesthetic experiences, so too does a first scene mold the way we read a text.

between Marne and Billy or the poignant understanding of Bazil and Geraldine's marriage, and the test of the most despised, as in Cordelia's lingering racism towards those who she had falsely believed killed her family. The space between *The Plague of Doves*'s several narrative threads may seem a formal representation of that incommensurate chasm between people magnified by historical atrocities that not only seem to foreclose human connection but also to rupture any sense of ethical or epistemological progress, as some characters seem to constantly revisit the lynching even in their sexual encounters.[72] But this distance between perspectives, the time between tellings, and difference among experiences also opens up a space for a different relatedness, an invitation to reach across the rupture, a potential to make meaning after violence, a call for connection. The "blood history" that stems from the novel's opening massacre and lynching not only connects all the characters in the novel, but also, because Erdrich bases the crimes on historical murders, connects the narrative to our reality.[73] Evelina offers a fitting description of the novel's genre as she ponders the lynching:

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[72] John Wildstrand, the grandson of a lead vigilante, finds forgiveness for his family's responsibility for the lynching through his intimacy with Maggie Peace, a relative of one of its victims. Wildstrand, who often cried with Maggie before and during sex, feels "an element of forgiveness in her weeping with him" (120).

[73] *The Plague of Doves* acknowledgement section states "[a]s in all of Louise Erdrich's books, the reservation, towns, and people depicted are imagined places and characters, with these exceptions: Louis Riel, and also the name Holy Track. In 1897, at the age of thirteen, Paul Holy Track was hanged by a mob in Emmons County, North Dakota" (313). In his distastefully titled book *Murdering Indians: A Documentary History of the 1897 Killings That Inspired Louise Erdrich's The Plague of Doves*, Peter Beidler pieces together many

> I think of how history works itself out in the living. The Buckendorfs, the other Wildstrands, the Peace family, all of these people whose backgrounds tangled in the hanging.… Now that some of us have mixed in the spring of our existence both guilt and victim, there is no unraveling the rope. (243)

This image of a knotted rope not only helps us to imagine the narrative structure of the novel, but also captures the sense of ethical responsibility through the tangled call and response. Although Erdrich positions the members of this historic generation at opposite ends of a lynch rope, she has Evelina conceptualize the current generation as emerging from muddy waters where responsibility and injury have mixed.

I argue Erdrich and others concentrate this narrative strategy on particular questions to forge a new novel of formation— the braided narrative: distinct stories told by different narrators that twine together to form a single novel. Marie-Laure Ryan has used the term "braided narrativity" in her descriptive taxonomy of the modes through which narrative can manifest in various media. I propose the braided narrative as a particular subtype of the novel that would both belong in Ryan's broad category, and, offer a specific set of formal criteria conducive to rethinking ethical issues.[74] More broadly, I posit that braided narratives

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primary sources from the 1897 murder of the Spicer family and the following lynching of three Native men from Standing Rock.

[74] Marie-Laure Ryan writes defines "braided narrativity" as "type of narrative follows the intertwined destinies of a large cast of The text presents no global plot, but a number of parallel and subplots developing along the destiny line of the characters" (374). She proposes soap operas as the prime example. Ryan proposed " modes of narrativity" to account for the various ways narrative exists in non-narrated media. Returning to the term

train readers to hold multiple, often incommensurate, subjectivities in our mind simultaneously, pushing us to embrace new channels of responsibility. In braided narratives, the spaces between narrative threads become apertures through which we can apprehend that which we cannot usually see—an intersubjective field linking people through a web of everyday attachments.[75] The complicated layering and intertwining of multiple narrative threads both activates readerly attachments to individual characters and forces a broader attention to the interconnections of a community. The act of reading, of making sense of many others' stories, of responding to their claims, knots us into a complicated braid where we must recognize a series of different narrators, acknowledge their interdependence and contradictions, and develop a series of responses that evolves into a sensibility of response that resonates across the novel. Erdrich is not the only novelist to pair multiple narrators who tell seemingly disconnected stories to pose questions about the possibility of human attachment in the shadow of our violent histories. Nicole Krauss rotates *The History of Love* (2005) among three character narrators, a third-person narrator, and an obituary. David Mitchell divides *Cloud Atlas* (2004) among six different narrators, whose relatedness across

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"narrative" both acknowledges that her taxonomy accurately describes the genre I'm discussing and seeks to limit this genre to forms with narrators.

[75] Psychoanalyst and philosopher Robert Stolorow explains that "intersubjective-systems theory" depends on the intersection between "phenomenological contextualism" and "affect—that is subjective emotional experience— [which] from birth onward is regulated, or misregulated, within ongoing relational systems" (1). See Chapter Two for a more detailed discussion of intersubjectivity.

time queries the potential of individual relationships in the face of social violence, and Margaret Atwood splits *The Year of The Flood* (2009) between a third-person narrator, a character narrator, and excerpts of sermons and hymns from God's Gardener services to redefine humanity in a world of creaturely connection. Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970), Karen Tei Yamashita's *The Tropic of Orange* (1997), and Ana Castillo's *The Guardians* (2007) also call on multiple narrators to tell distinct stories that cohere into novels about the potential for attachments in world shaded by devastating socially organized violence.

In this chapter, I focus on Erdrich's *The Plague of Doves* and Krauss' *The History of Love* to propose the genre of the braided narrative: novels comprised of multiple narrative threads that braid together to push readers toward an historically conditioned responsibility. Although these two novels are rarely discussed together, partly because they address such different histories and also because the academy still sorts along identity lines, both novels use this similar narrative structure both to face and to move forward from a different extreme of the human capacity for annihilation. *The History of Love* unfolds in the shadow of the catastrophic devastation of the Holocaust, a period appalling because of the concentration of so many deaths in such a small span of time, while *The Plague of Doves* revolves around the lynching of four Native men, a single instance of the centuries long insidious and chameleon killings of indigenous peoples in the Americas. The horror of the Holocaust stems in part from both the colossal scope of the massacre and the idea that such a huge genocide could be rendered invisible at the time by a collective refusal to see and to believe. As we know from historical experience of African Americans in the United States, the evil efficacy of lynchings, on the other hand, depends precisely on their visibility, a spectacle staged to

construct a race as sub-human.[76] The ritualized and public murder of individuals framed as exceptions made possible the exploitation and oppression of the rest whereas the Nazis efforts at elimination sought to make no exceptions. Although Erdrich centers her novel on a particular lynching, she situates that crime at the end of a long century of massacres called battles through which the United States won the west underscoring the way in which a series of violences recorded as separate fuse into what Leslie Marmon Silko calls in *Almanac of the Dead* "the Native American holocaust."[77] The European Holocaust is conceived as the ultimate atrocity that destroyed any sense of ethical or epistemological progress in Western history. Lyotard rhetorically asks: "[w]hat kind of thought is able to sublate (Aufheben) Auschwitz in a general (either empirical or speculative) process towards a universal emancipation?" the answer, to this unanswerable question, is, of course, that no thought can rationalize or even make sense of the terrible massacre that took place there or in other concentration camps (1934). "The killing of the Indians," on the other hand, is one of the "hard facts" that, as Philip Fisher argues in his book of the same title, made possible the foundation of the United States (5). Further, while the violence of lynching is imagined to have occurred outside of the state apparatus whose white supremacy it shored up, another horror of Holocaust, is that its destructive effort to eliminate an entire community was the explicit project of the state itself. Neither *The History of Love* nor *The Plague of Doves* seeks

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[76] Amy Louise Wood's book on the subject, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing and Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (2009), argues "[t]he cultural power of lynching—indeed, the cultural power of white supremacy itself—rested on spectacle: the crowds, the rituals and performances, and their sensational representations in narratives, photographs, and films" (3).

[77] From a chapter called "On The Trial for Crimes Against Tribal Histories."

to make sense of the historical violence that each takes as its central thread. Instead, the interlaced narratives dwell on questions about how we can live in a world thus shattered and even find joy after experiences of such pain.

Although dealing with such different horrors, *The History of Love* and *The Plague of Doves* both turn to, and help to craft, the genre of the braided narrative. Both Krauss and Erdrich's novels balance an engagement with the dark histories of attempted annihilation with an attention to the frustrations and joys of individual intimacies that we all might experience. Each text spans the twentieth century, braiding together the experiences of multiple characters to trace the aftershock of historic trauma. *The History of Love* follows two generations: first, character narrator Leo Gursky and focalized Zvi Litvinoff, two refugees from the "sometimes Pol[ish] and sometimes Russia[n]" town of Slonim, who end up in New York City and Valparaiso, Chile, respectively (7). Second, Krauss twines these immigrant narratives with the first person voices of Alma and Bird, a sister and brother, two generations younger than Leo and Zvi. *The Plague of Doves* chronicles the complex interrelations between the turn-of-the-century contact generation and their mid-twentieth century descendants who forge their relationships on the plains of what we might call North Dakota, but what Erdrich pushes us to see as the contested borderlands of not only the United States and Canada, but also the sovereign nations of Ojibwe and Métis peoples. In Krauss and Erdrich's novels, as in many braided narratives, historical collective pain radiates and refracts from moment to moment in personal intimacies, even decades later. For both the novelists and their narrators, a faith in narrative, whether fiction or storytelling, becomes central to the project of forming meaningful attachments in a world so wrought with historical cruelty. In *The Plague of Doves*, Erdrich proposes oral storytelling as a sister art to

music; while sound temporarily arrests her characters and then calls them toward a greater responsibility towards others, telling stories about shared history forces characters to both experience their story world differently and behave differently in it. *The History of Love*, on the other hand, makes palpable the stakes of the silence associated with the Holocaust and puts forward a fiction-within-a-fiction, also called *The History of Love*, as the single most powerful force pulling characters towards touching human connections. In both novels, the space between narrative threads, the twining together of distinct stories, pushes readers to face the way history still bleeds in the present and challenges us develop a type of responsibility that is attentive to different and possibly incommensurate human experiences. Importantly, both *The History of Love* and *The Plague of Doves* foreground a child-narrator who pushes readers toward a reading that attends to the interconnectedness among disparate narrative threads.

Before focusing on the way in which Erdrich and Krauss craft the genre of the braided narrative to trace the potential for human attachments after such destruction, I outline the formal elements of the braided narrative and try to mark the ethical stakes of the genre. The definition I propose is more interested in drawing attention to a set of novels that although not usually discussed together seem to be doing similar work than in demarcating strict boundaries of what this genre is or isn't. Because many writers who are helping to mold the genre of the braided narrative are considered postmodern artists ("post-modern" is the slur Silko famously used to critique Erdrich's *Beet Queen*), I pause to consider the braided narrative's relationship to that period.[78] While the novels considered here do grapple

[78] In her review, "Here's An Odd Artifact for the Fairy-Tale Shelf" Leslie Marmon Silko argues that Erdrich's postmodern style prevents adequate attention to historical material

with questions central to postmodern thought, I suggest that the braided narrative comes to different conclusions or moves the postmodern project towards a less nihilistic sense of attachment. After sketching my formal understanding of braided narratives, I turn to their ethical work because I believe they foster an important sense of awareness and responsibility that is exigent in our contemporary moment because our world is burdened by the same historical violence that shadows Krauss and Erdrich's novels. Finally, I return to *The Plague of Doves* and *The History of Love* as two braided narratives that exemplify the way this genre can train readers both to "take in" history and to develop a sense of responsibility that is attentive to socially conditioned difference.

BRAIDED NARRATIVE

Formally, braided narratives have distinct narrators who tell different stories that both conflict and intertwine in the same story world. I hope that naming and tracing the characteristics of the braided narrative will bring due attention to a genre whose ethical work is especially important to our current political climate. The drawings below should illustrate the complex intertwining of narrative threads in *The History of Love* and *The Plague of Doves*.

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realities. Silko writes, "Post-modern, self-referential writing reflects the isolation and alienation of the individual who shares nothing in common with other human beings but language and its hygienic grammatical mechanisms. Self-referential writing is light-years away from shared or communal experience that underlies oral narrative and modern fiction" (180).

***The History of Love* (2005) Nicole Krauss** ***The Plague of Doves* (2008) Louise Erdrich**

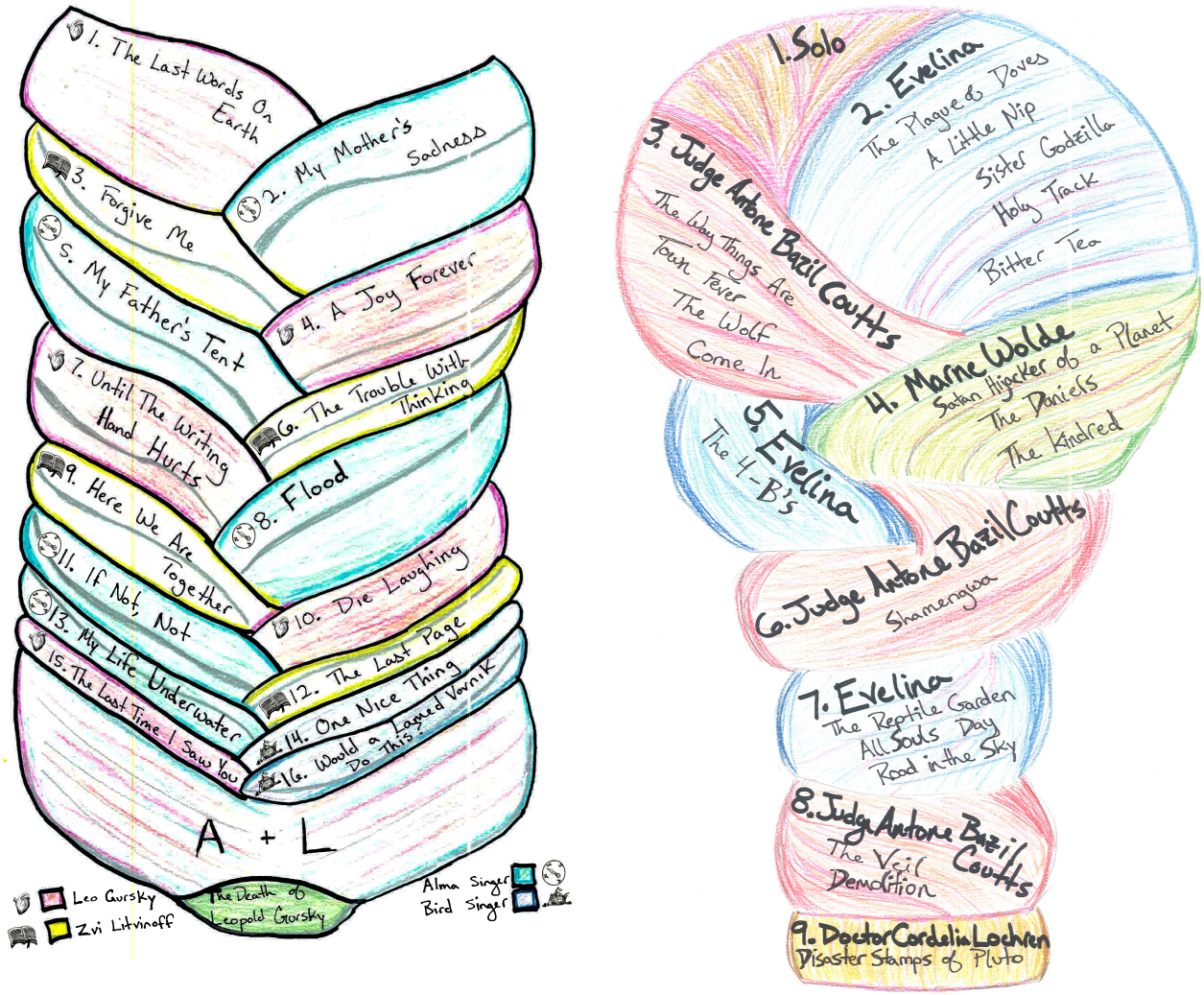

Figure 4: Drawings of the braided structure of *The History of Love* and *The Plague of Doves*

In both drawings the braid represents a progression of discourse time; the top of the braid indicates the beginning of the novel, and the bottom illustrates the end. Each narrator has a specific color, and the thickness of their strand is roughly proportionate to the length of that section of the novel; for instance, Leo and Alma each speak for longer chapters in the beginning of the *History of Love* than they do in the end. In *The Plague of Doves*, Erdrich names her sections after her narrators, and Krauss marks her chapters with a series of identifying symbols, as you can see in the key. Artists crafting the braided narrative vary in terms of how they allot pages to their narrators. I refer Erdrich's divisions as sections

because she allows some of her narrators multiple chapters, themselves separated by their own title and/ or an aviary/ floral symbol:  . Some of those chapters are divided into smaller subchapters, separated by the same symbol, which can be as short as a paragraph. Krauss, on the other hand, has her characters take chapter-long turns (with the exception of a final scene that I'll focus on below), and lets each character determine the internal divisions: Leo mixes his creative writing with his narration, Alma numbers the notes in her journal, and Bird dates his diary entries.

As the term and image imply, braided narratives must be comprised of multiple narratives that twine together to form a novel. I'm thinking of narrative both in the classical sense as a story represented in discourse and the rhetorical sense that James Phelan explains as "somebody telling somebody else on some occasion and for some purpose(s) that something happened" (18). While the text of novels themselves stand as a single discourse designed by the implied author, the component narrative threads have different discursive voices. Each of Krauss's three character narrators and a fourth character focalized in the third person tell different stories in different styles for different purposes. Leo wants recognition from someone, anyone, especially from the son who never met him; Alma struggles to help her family find happiness after her father's death; Bird considers his religious callings; and Zvi, the focalized character, deals with his own decision to plagiarize Leo's novel as his own. In *The Plague of Doves* as well, each of Erdrich's character-narrators tell different stories in distinct voices for their individual reasons. Evelina comes of age and comes out; Bazil courts Geraldine even as he recounts other's histories; Marne Wolde tells of her relationship with Billy Peace; and Cordelia describes the twilight of Pluto. Both novels are braided narratives because each narrator tells a particular and unique narrative.

Braided narratives trouble the narratological distinction between discourse time and story time. While these terms usually help us to distinguish the order of the telling from the chronology of the told, each narrator in braided narratives demands her own discourse time, which readers must comprehend in relation to the novel's discourse time. For instance, Leo begins *The History of Love* by unreliably narrating his story in chronological order beginning at the end of the summer of his eightieth year with brief analepses that share important moments of his past. Although she takes her narrative turn after Leo, Alma narrates at a different discourse time than he; in her first chapter she indicates that she is already fifteen, an event that, we later learn will not occur until September 30th, at least a month after the discourse time of the majority of Leo's chapters (38,170). Further, fifteen pages into his story, Leo narrates a passing moment, that occurs in both his story and discourse present, where he meets a teenage girl in a tattered oversized sweatshirt (15). Three quarters of the novel later, Alma, narrating from a discourse moment in the future, explains how she started attending art classes, which might make her the teenage girl Leo met earlier (193). To make things more complicated, the sections that focalize Zvi Litvinoff, begin with his death and work backwards to his earlier life. In braided narratives, readers must account for the novel's discourse time (the way the words on the pages in the chapters progress) and the discourse time of each narrator, which, as Krauss's novel illustrates, might not overlap. In *The Plague of Doves*, the discourse time among all narrators seems to progress in chronologic order, but Erdrich has many narrators focalize or frame the accounts of other character's stories, so the story time wavers between the discourse present in the mid 20th century and turn of the century period of the characters' ancestors. In *Affective Narratology: The Emotional Structure of Stories* (2011), Patrick Hogan proposes a descriptive distinction between

discourse and story. He writes, "[a] story, descriptively characterized, is first of all a given reader's intentional object built up from his or her experience of a particular discourse" (100). In other words, the discourse is the author's words on the page, and the story is how readers use those words to fill in and imagine a coherent story in our mind. Because the words on the page literally represent the novel's discourse, that is a shared category. The story, on the other hand, may vary individually from reader to reader even as we strive to collaborate with the author's words to create a single story that finds coherence among the various narrators' accounts. Hogan's understanding of this distinction can help us see how readers can become so imbricated in braided narratives. Since the relationship between the various narrators' discourses is so complex, readers must do a lot of imaginative work to make a story.

In addition to telling multiple unique stories, braided narratives must also have multiple distinct narrators. Krauss divides *The History of Love* among three character narrators and one omniscient narrator, and Erdrich balances *The Plague of Doves* among four different character narrators, and that eerie opening omniscience. Toni Morrison famously divides *Jazz* (1992) among several different first person and third person narrators. Karen Tei Yamashita splits *The Tropic of Orange* (1997) among seven narrative threads, two of which have identifiably distinct narrators: Gabriel narrates his sections in the first person, and a different third person, marked by its Spanglish street cred syntax, focalizes Bobby Ngu. Novels that do not enact both formal criteria do not participate fully in the genre and do not afford the ethical possibilities that I discuss below. For instance, many novels, such as several of Faulkner's works, do have multiple narrators, but they collaborate to tell the same

story rather than distinct narratives.[79] Likewise, in Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible* (1998), the Price women take turns telling their stories as they relate to the father's folly. In these examples, characters do narrate from their own perspectives, but they center their contributions on a shared experience that functions as a single plot line rather than focusing on distinct, seemingly unrelated, stories. Novels that have several story lines but a single narrator are not braided narratives either. For instance, although Helena Maria Viramontes's *Their Dogs Came with Them* and Leslie Marmon Silko's *The Almanac of The Dead* do focus on multiple stories, they each have a single narrator.[80]

The formal emphasis on difference, in both perspective and plot, affirms the braided narrative's intervention into how we imagine collective experience. Novels with single narrators and protagonists tend to shore up the legal emphasis on individuality associated with nation-states in the liberal Western tradition. As Critical Legal Studies scholar Mark Kelman points out,

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[79] To my mind, Faulkner's novels often focus relentlessly on the same series of events or on anxiety about the mysterious dark space Faulkner associates with women: all the narrators of *As I Lay Dying* (1930) work together to narrate the burial of Addie Bundren. In the same vein, the narrators of *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) all contribute to Faulkner's obsession with the female reproductive system as they each express fascination with or a desire to control the sexual activities and uterine spaces of the Compson women.

[80] The desire to tell multiple stories is not new, but the addition of multiple narrators might be. In George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, a single beloved narrator guides us between three distinct narratives, and a single narrator leads us through the many stories that collide in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*.

> [t]he synthetic individualist tradition that liberal legalism both reflects and recreates helps to fool us into believing that we ought always to be able to imagine concrete individual dyads, particular paired persons, one burdened party owing a duty to the other rights holder, a hypothetical plaintiff and a defendant in a law suit. (279)

By emphasizing the interrelationship between distinct stories of multiple narrators, braided narratives trouble this easy dyad. However, braided narratives are not just about expanding the legal relationship from a dyad to a plurality; rather, this genre tries to shift the very way we imagine human beings as connected. Critical Race Scholar Patricia Williams offers an example that describes this necessary turn:

> Imagine a glass half full (or half empty) of blue marbles. Their very hard-edged, discrete, yet identical nature makes it possible for the community of blue marbles to say to one another with perfect consistency both "we are all the same" and, if a few roll away and are lost in a sidewalk grate, "that's just their experience, fate, choice, bad luck." If, on the other hand, one imagines a glass full of soap-bubbles, with shifting permeable boundaries, expanding and contracting in size like a living organism, then it is not possible for the collective bubbles to describe themselves as "all the same." Furthermore, if one of the bubbles bursts, it cannot be isolated as a singular phenomenon. It will be felt as a tremor, a realignment, a reclustering among all. (546)

Braided narratives embrace Williams's soap-bubbles concept. Unlike the marbles that read themselves as equal and therefore the same because of a rigid rubric of individual rights, narrators and focalized characters within braided narratives insist on their particularity even

as their authors pushes readers to understand their connectedness. For instance, Louise Erdrich's *Tracks* (1988) may seem to fall into the dyadic structure facilitated by the liberal model of the nation-state because it has only two narrators, Nanapush and Pauline, who do give each other much grievance. However, Erdrich crafts her novel so that both narrators not only tell their own stories, but also unwillingly and conflictingly collaborate to focalize Fleur's. As much as Pauline and Nanapush hate each other and wish the other would roll away through the sidewalk grate, Erdrich emphasizes how their stories and Fleur's shake, tremble, and reform because of the experiences of the others. Importantly, Williams does not intend the idea of multiple soap-bubbles to preclude an understanding that membership in a particular group privileges some soap-bubbles at the expense of others. The formal structure of braided narratives also positions that genre to highlight the way inequities tend to ascribe to socially constructed group lines, as we have seen in the way *The Plague of Doves* stitches the insidious logic of lynching into the subsequent tellings of the opening scene's violence.

Because of their interconnected soap-bubble nature, braided narratives cannot be called short story cycles, as some have claimed. Although scholarship on this genre is varied, most established theorists, such as James Nagel, describe the short story cycle as a literary form where "each component work must stand alone (with a beginning, middle, and end) yet be enriched in the context of the interrelated stories" (15). James Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914) and Richard Wright's *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938) epitomize the short story cycle because each constituent story in those respective works can be read, studied, and enjoyed on its own although the companion stories do enrich the thematic threads. Like words in English sentences, each story in a short story cycle can stand alone, with its own sense, meaning and significance—they function as discrete interchangeable pieces, like blue

marbles. The strands of a braided narrative, on the other hand, are more like units in polysynthetic languages where several variable morphemes constitute a single nuanced word that itself can function as a sentence. Although some parts of *Plague of Doves* appeared first as short stories in publications such as *The New Yorker* and *The Atlantic Monthly*, Erdrich does not incorporate them in the omnibus nature characteristic of the short story cycle. Rather, she amends, embeds, and inflects them in such a way that they become tangled with the novel's plot strands. In fact, Erdrich wrote the important scene between character narrator Bazil Coutts and his wife Geraldine that I discuss at the close of this chapter only for the novel. Although braided narratives are comprised of several distinct narratives, those stories cannot usually "stand alone" as Nagel claims of the short story cycle. Instead, the writers of the genre tend to divide the various narratives into small fragments and intertwine them with pieces from other narrators. Even if we only read a single narrator's contributions, we'd miss much of the plot, which readers can fill in based on information shared by the other narrators. For instance, in *The History of Love*, we would not fully understand what happened to Leo's manuscript if it weren't for the chapters focalizing Zvi Litvinoff. Similarly, in *The Plague of Doves*, we only understand Bazil's allusions to history because Evelina spells out the history for us in her sections. Further, braided narratives require multiple narrators, which is not essential to the short story cycle tradition. Some of the most well-known short story cycles have a single narrator whether that is a character narrator as in Sarah Orne Jewett's *Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896), a consistent third-person as in Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919), or a regular frame such as in the northern narrator who frames character narrator Uncle Julian's stories in Charles Chesnutt's *The Conjure Woman* (1899). Finally, the component narratives of short story cycles do not need

to belong in the same story world. In Richard Wright's *Uncle Tom's Children* and James Joyce's *The Dubliners*, the stories clearly "enrich" each other with their thematic tones, but we do not expect to meet any recurring characters we work through the cycles (Nagel 15). That all the narrative threads of a given braided narratives take place in the same story world help to make that genre a novel. The short story cycle, on the other hand, is usually understood, as Forrest Ingram proposed, as a spectrum bounded by collected stories on one side and the novel on the other.

Braided narratives are necessarily novels not only because, as Bakhtin points out, the novel "incorporates other [genres] into its own peculiar structure", but also because braided narratives do the work often attributed to novels, such as imagining communities as Benedict Anderson has explained and narrating personality as Suzanne Langer has noted (Bakhtin 5; Langer 286). Anderson argues that the novel and the newspaper are "two forms of imagining which first flowered in Europe in the eighteenth century…. For these forms provided the technical means for 're-presenting' the kind of imagined community that is the nation" (25). In particular, Anderson asserts that novels help people imagine an interconnection among multiple anonymous individuals living in the same period in a nationally defined physical space. More specifically, Lynn Hunt isolates the eighteenth century epistolary novel as a particular form that helped Europeans to imagine "a new form of empathy" that facilitated the emergence of rights rhetoric associated with modern nation-states (38). Braided narratives do help readers to imagine community, but they do not ascribe to the geographic or temporal boundaries that Anderson associates with the genre. Both Erdrich and Krauss's novels span multiple generations and multiple nations foregrounding the profound influence history has on the present and drawing a horizon that transcends the nation-state. In *The*

History of Love, Krauss follows the older generation from the small town of Slonim to the streets of New York City and the cafés of Valparaíso Chile, and allows her younger generation to imagine their mother's youth in England and to visit their grandparents in Israel. Erdrich positions her story world at the border of multiple nation-states: the settler-colonies of the U.S. and Canada, the sovereign nations of the Ojibwe and the Métis national movement led by Louis Riel. Like *The Plague of Doves* and *The History of Love*, many braided narratives embrace an interest in characters simultaneously connected across and separated by time and national borders. For instance, Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* jumps from a Californian in mid-nineteenth century New Zealand to an artificially intelligent "fabricant" in a future East Asian state, stopping in 1930s Belgium, 1970s California, and contemporary Britain in between. So, just as the epistolary novel may be the key form of the 18th century emergence of nation-states, the braided narrative may be a central genre that helps contemporary readers to imagine a globalized interconnectedness. In both periods, however, the broader category of the novel pushes readers to imagine community by inviting us to join the fictional experience of characters who seem as if they could possibly inhabit our own social world. Just as the eponymous heroines of *Julie*, *Pamela*, and *Clarissa* helped Europeans to broaden their understanding of who belonged in their communities and deserved similar rights in Hunt's argument, the diverse narrators of braided narratives help contemporary readers to reconsider the conceptual and geographic boundaries of our own imagined communities.

Even two centuries after the formative moment Anderson and Hunt discuss, the novel remains an important aesthetic force for imagining connectivity, perhaps because of the immersive nature of story worlds, a key characteristic that make braided narratives novels.

In 1953, Langer argued, "the novel is particularly suited to formulate our modern life by taking our most pervasive interest for its theme—the evaluation and the hazards of personality" (286). By attending to the individual lives of characters in the context of "the social order," Langer argues novels help us to face the "[u]nfamiliar feelings" engendered by our historical moment that "make us afraid of ourselves and each other" (286-7). Braided narratives embrace this interest in personality by foregrounding multiple distinct narrators and negotiate a social order where connections and challenges transcend national boundaries. In tacit acknowledgement of Langer's argument that "above all the novel [is] our staple poetic diet" many publishers label novels as such on the cover (286). Since 2006 Erdrich's current publisher, Harper Collins, has labeled almost all her novels "*a novel.*"[81] Like Harper Collins, Norton, Penguin, Random House and others use this strategy for many of their contemporary authors. Readers also read braided narratives as novels (in chronologic order and all the way through) partially because constituent narratives take place in the same story world even as they focus on different stories. The way braided narratives play with the discourse story distinction is only possible because the texts push readers to imagine that the multiple stories intersect in a single story world. In both Krauss' *The History of Love* and Erdrich's *The Plague of Doves*, we anticipate possible meetings between the characters. In both novels, the first narrator describes the second narrator without naming them, priming the readers to look for interconnections among the stories. This expectation that narrators may be background characters in other narrator's sections is a common characteristic of braided narratives. In Zadie Smith's *NW* (2012), also labeled a novel, we look for Leah and Natalie

[81] Before 2006, Erdrich's novels were not labeled novels. After 2006 editions of previously published novels, as well as new novels, have been labeled as such.

to turn up in Felix's section in ways we don't expect the various characters from Joyce's *Dubliners* to show up in each other's stories. Further, in *The Year of the Flood*, we are not surprised to learn that one focalized character appears as a character in another narrator's section. This expectation to find seemingly unrelated characters in other character's sections facilitates the imaginative work that Anderson and Hunt first imagined. Rather than helping readers to broaden their community from those they recognize in their parish to those who identify with a similar nation, braided narratives push us to expect connections even among diverse and disconnected characters.

PAUSE FOR POSTMODERN PLAY

Before turning to the ethical work of braided narratives, we should pause briefly to consider this genre's relationship to the postmodern period for a few reasons. First, many have claimed that postmodern aesthetics emerged to negotiate our contemporary social experience, and insofar as I believe braided narratives do just that, they must be in conversation with the postmodern project. Second, fragmentation is both a major organizing principle of braided narratives and a central trope of postmodern fiction. Finally, as I have indicated, many authors crafting the braided narrative get critically (in both senses of the word) glossed as postmodern artists. My purpose here is not as much to prove that the writers I associate with the braided narrative are not postmodern as to trace the ways in which this genre develops or moves beyond the theorized horizons of the postmodern project. The primary point of departure is the phenomenological relationship between the present and history, which, as Silko's critique of Erdrich suggests, has important ramifications for understanding individuals as both subjects and as members of groups.

Braided narratives do not fully embody the aesthetics and epistemology Jameson and others associate with the postmodern period. First, postmodernism usually presupposes, as Jameson writes, "some radical break or coupure, generally traced back to the end of the 1950s or the early 1960s" (1). Brian McHale, tongue only partly in cheek, locates this shift "in or about 1966" not only because Italian architects began their postmodern musings then, but also because that year witnessed Andy Warhol's *Silver Clouds*, Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot* 49, a plethora of "rock breakthroughs" and many other innovations in art and literature (406, 401). This revolution in the art world reflects a wider skepticism and ultimate break with the Western enlightenment idea of progress; as Lyotard explains, "[t]his idea of progress as possible, probable or necessary was rooted in the certainty that the development of arts, technology, knowledge, and liberty would be profitable to mankind as a whole" and was believed to lead to a universal "emancipation of mankind" (Lyotard 1934). The cataclysmic events of the twentieth century refute this hopeful notion, and instead assert a human aptitude for annihilation that Lyotard and others acknowledge through the place name "Auschwitz." Braided narratives also broach mankind's potential for destruction, but do so in ways that don't "*stall out*" as McHale says of Bob Dylan, the Beatles, and *The Crying of Lot 49* or "break down" as Andreas Killen titles his book on the period (406,7). Perhaps, this is because some of the artists crafting braided narratives work with a history that already had rejected the grand narrative of progress and realized the potential for human aggression and destruction long before the twentieth century. As Erdrich understands, for many Indigenous tribes, the world-altering rift began in 1492 and devastated in waves as settlement wormed its way across the continent. As Morrison remembers, Black people wrestled with slavery in the Americas for centuries longer than they have struggled in freedom. Helena Maria

Viramontes condemns the continuing legacy of the Spanish conquest in the title of her novel *Their Dogs Came With Them* (2007) and Maxine Hong Kingston confronts the ghosts that continue to haunt this land in *Woman Warrior: Memoir of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (1976). Five centuries of facing such destruction creates a certain sense of what Gerald Vizenor calls survivance; he writes "[t]he shimmers of imagination are reason and the simulations are survivance, not dominance; an aesthetic restoration of trickster hermeneutics, the stories of liberation and survivance without the dominance of closure" (14). For Vizenor, survivance embraces a comic turn that not only asserts survival in the face of repeated attempted extermination but also refutes the tragic narrative structures that the social sciences turn to to write the history of Native peoples.[82] This sort of survivance aesthetic not only acknowledges the long history of annihilation, but also embraces and elicits a sort of *joie de vivre* not associated with the burnout of the 1960s and 70s art that McHale interrogates. Although Vizenor participates in postmodern theorizing, I see his ideas as marking an important point of departure both because he roots his theory in the trickster tradition, which has strong links to the past, and because his turn to comedy asserts the affect of joy. Krauss, who writes after and in the shadow of the Holocaust, the event that marks for postmodern theory the ultimate rupture of Western experience, does not rely on the tragic mode that usually holds art addressing that history. Instead, Krauss draws on hopeful humor similar to that which Vizenor associates survivance.

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[82] Vizenor notes that "[Alan] Velie was the first scholar to observe the comic and ironic themes in Native American Indian literature. His interpretations were literary, a wise departure from the surveillance of the social sciences. The tribes were tragic, never comic, or ironic, in the literature of dominance" (79).

Erdrich plays with architecture, the field that pioneered postmodern art, to foreground her investment in history through the very stage of her story world. Many scenes in *The Plague of Doves*, notably in the closing chapter, take place under "[t]he granite façade, arched windows, and twenty-foot ceilings" of the 4-B's Café (295). The odd design of Pluto's town-center would fascinate Jameson who finds "the random cannibalization of all the styles of the past, the play of random stylistic allusion" central to his concept of pastiche (10). Although the 4-B's décor appears random, Erdrich mixes history into the very mortar of the walls themselves.[83] What Jameson poses as simulacrum Erdrich shapes as the sedimented original. Evelina explains that "[t]he restaurant had once been the National Bank of Pluto" and describes its elaborate turn-of-the-century architecture:

> The ceilings were high and the lights hung down on elegant brass fixtures fixed to decorative scalloped plaster bowls. There were brass rails along the counters and the floors were old terrazzo, the walls sheeted with marble, and in the corners there were a set of dignified marble half columns. (190)

When the bank folded in the mid-fifties, subsequent owners layered on their era's style. Evelina points to the café's sign: "four B's hooked together, an old livestock brand belonging to the first owner," perhaps an artifact from the cattle industry central to North Dakota's early economy (190). Evelina notes the clash between this ranching relic and the bumblebee

[83] Although the 4-B's Café seems a direct pun on postmodern architecture, it also participates in a broader argument Erdrich makes about history that is larger than a periodization dispute. In *Four Souls*, the sequel to *Tracks*, Erdrich builds the logging company owner's house out of the very timber stolen from the woods surrounding Matchimanito Lake in the earlier novel.

theme that the 1960s owners contributed: "[b]ees here, bees there, bees printed on the napkins. The waitresses wore yellow shirts with black pants or skirts, our 'uniform'" (190). When we visit the café again in the early eighties of the last chapter, we don't think twice about the ornate architecture leftover from the early bank, the rustic repurposed livestock brand, or the gaudy bees. Instead, this historic spot now "serves as office space for town council and hobby club members, meeting place for church society and card playing groups" and, tellingly, the workplace of Pluto's Historical Society (296). While the 4-B's Café does display a historical eclecticism, it cannot be called postmodern architecture, which as Jameson tells us "randomly and without principle but with gusto cannibalizes all the architectural styles of the past and combines them in overstimulating ensembles" (11). Rather than fetishizing historical styles while effacing history as a referent altogether as Jameson suggests, Erdrich layers her stage with the historical sets of past scenes, enriching every narrative moment with its historical depth.

Just as the 4-B's Café makes present multiple eras of Pluto's history, so too do braided narratives invite us to hold the past together with the present. Erdrich's play with the pastiche of postmodern architecture takes a more somber turn as she crafts the Pluto Town Cemetery, where Bazil worked before becoming a lawyer and tribal judge. There, the various styles of preceding periods collect under the moss of the headstones and monuments. More importantly, the manager learns the particular history of each person interred there, but Erdrich's spatial investment in time extends into the future as well as the past. In the same tour of the cemetery's history, the manager observes that Bazil's family's plot has room for his future family, a thought that "seemed far off and laughable then, but as time has passed I have become increasingly grateful that those places next to my ancestors lie empty and

waiting" (275). For Erdrich, history is not only built into the physical world of the present, but also generations from the past and future haunt each moment.

The investment in the presence of history that Erdrich makes manifest in the 4-B's Café is a central feature of the narrative structure of braided narratives. History is not just the spatial stage of Erdrich's novels, but the central thread and conflict that all her characters must confront— as Evelina says, "I think of how history works itself out in the living" (243). Jameson writes that postmodern art is realist only to the extent that it describes a "new and original historical situation in which we are condemned to seek History by way of our own pop images and simulacra of that history, which itself remains forever out of reach" (15). The narratives of *The History of Love* and *The Plague of Doves* waver relentlessly between the historical generations that survived horrific traumas of the Holocaust and lynching and a contemporary generation that tries to understand that very present historical presence. For Erdrich, history not only calls to her narrators, asking to be told, but also courses through the veins of her characters. The violence of the past plays such a large role in the novel that history becomes a character itself that other characters must acknowledge. Braided narratives and postmodernism both confront a history in which annihilation is a real threat and an epistemology in which we cannot really fully know a single truth, but they respond differently. While the postmodern project dwells on these fissures between perspectives, braided narratives strive to bridge them. Both postmodern aesthetics and braided narratives recognize a rupture between our ability to know each other and the world, but braided narratives see that abyss as a "potential space" for meaning-making pretense. As we have seen contemporary psychoanalysts have built on Winnicott's concept of "potential space" to develop theories of intersubjectivity, which, as I'll explain in greater detail below, I see as the

third term that can help us best understand the ethical work of braided narratives beyond the postmodern project.

Postmodern aesthetics attempt to represent an epistemological shattering through "the death of the subject," "schizophrenic writing," or a "breakdown in the signifying chain" where coherent meaning gets lost (Jameson 8,15). Although the structure of braided narratives can be called fragmented because we do not get anyone's full story, the subjects who narrate are not themselves fragmented in the sense of Pynchon's Slothrop or other postmodern anti-heroes. Rather, both Krauss and Erdrich's characters narrate with a fierce desire for recognition of their subjectivity; as Leo Gurksy unapologetically puts it on the first page of *The History of Love*, "I try to make a point of being seen" (3). Although Krauss's characters do struggle with experiences of being invisible or hollow, they never lose their mimetic status as possible people or indicate an awareness of themselves as characters. Just as Erdrich challenged postmodern aesthetics through the architecture of the 4-Bs Café, she questions the "death of the subject" by concretizing the theory in Evelina's "Entropy"-like college experience. After trying acid, Evelina realizes, "what a slim rail I walked. I had lost my unifier of sensations, lost mind, lost confidence in my own control over my sanity" (225). The drug trip weakened Evelina's ability to cohere her experiences into a single narrative, just as high postmodern literature resists comprehensible interpretations in an effort to represent the decentered subject. The fragmentation of Evelina's psyche worsens during her internship and eventual internment in a mental hospital where she fears

> [l]osing my observer, the self that tells me what to do. My consciousness is fragile ground, shaky as forming ice. Every morning, when I open my eyes

> and experience my first thought I am flooded with relief. The *I* is still here. If it goes, there will be only gravity (241).

Through Evelina, Erdrich illustrates the pain and fear associated with the dissolution of a particular subject and demonstrates what the theory would look like if it were real. Evelina clings to a particular *I* in an effort to ground herself in this world. Corwin's violin music ultimately helps her to build a "whole" self around that fragile core. Corwin's solo helps Evelina to acknowledge her small, but complete, self in relation to the larger, immense world, a connectedness she lost after her acid trip. Evelina gains a "dark assurance" from the chords that claims an outside reality regardless of her mental state (246). The music itself not only helps Evelina to center herself as a small individual in relation to a greater emotion, but also empowers her to leave the mental hospital. In the car ride home, Evelina comes out to Corwin, putting words to an important aspect of her identity that we may have suspected since her sixth grade crush on her teacher, Sister Mary Anita. Although Erdrich acknowledges the allure of postmodern fragmentation, she ultimately allows her characters to find a sense of wholeness and interconnection through music, an important art form that we'll develop more below. Importantly, Evelina's recentering not only helps her to come out, but also prepares her to share the description of the braided narrative, where she asserts "that some of us have mixed in the spring of our existence both guilt and victim, there is no unraveling the rope" (243). The knotted rope that is a braided narrative depends on multiple subjects, not the shattering of a single subject.

ETHICS AND INTERSUBJECTIVITY

While all narrative situations are themselves ethical (in the sense that we can refuse recognition as easily as putting the book down and that every set of human attachments

inflects with a certain ethical tension), braided narratives facilitate a particularly challenging ethical work. On the one hand, the strategy of shifting narrators draws on our readerly tendency to identify with the various protagonists, but it also repeatedly distances us, positioning us again and again as listeners, respondents to new and different calls. Each time we shift narrators in the braided narrative, a new character tugs on the reader's sleeve with a new desire, like Leo's, to be seen. As those various narrative threads "expose themselves," in Newton's words, over the course of their sections their calls evolve into particular claims, whether those claims are explicitly voiced by a character as in Leo's plea for recognition or evoked by the narrative situation such as the issue of plagiarism in the sections focalizing Zvi Litvinoff (22). The representation and formal structure of repeated narrative situations emphasizes the sense of narrative ethics that Newton discusses. While Newton draws on philosophies of Emmanuel Levinas, Stanley Cavell, and Mikhail Bakhtin to theorize the ethical ramifications of narrative, Phelan has delineated a schema we might use to see how particular ethical questions arise from the texts themselves. He identifies four ethical positions in narrative: first, "that of the characters within the story world," second, "that of the narrator in relation to the telling, to the told, and to the audience," third, "that of the implied author in relation to the telling, the told, and the authorial audience," and fourth, "that of the flesh-and-blood reader in relation to the set of values, beliefs, and locations operating in situations 1-3" (Phelan 23). Phelan's schema helps us to differentiate between the ethical claims characters pose within the story world, the ethical ambiguities that arise in the various narrative situations, and the way those interrelated challenges contribute to the ethical work of particular novels.

In braided narratives, readers find ourselves claimed by not one, but multiple narratives, resulting in a complicated layering of calls that we must negotiate in order to even make sense of the novel. With each new narrator, we not only get to see the story from a particular perspective, but also are arrested with a new and different appeal—to listen, to respond, to witness, even to resist. These multiple narrators claim us in the first ethical dimension; they pull us to feel different pleas or to recognize different subjects. The intersections and overlaps between narratives however emphasize the second ethical dimension of ought or responsibility. Even as we try to make sense out of the relationship between two narrative strands, we must develop some criteria with which to evaluate the different events and characters. Often certain character narrators help us develop these criteria. In *The History of Love*, we hold Leo's call in mind as we turn to subsequent narrators who raise distinct questions and concerns. Grappling with the sometimes conflicting relationship of these various calls not only helps us to find coherence in the novel, but also pushes us to develop a sensibility of response that resonates among all narrators. In Krauss's novel the major characters feel called to and compelled by the fiction-within-the-fiction, also called *The History of Love*, that eighty-year-old Leo originally composed for his childhood sweetheart. Because the second narrator, adolescent Alma, draws our attention to the significance of this text-within-the-text, certain details become salient in other characters' sections. Alma's questions about the novel-within-the-novel orient readers both to interpret the plot level connections between sections and to regard the various narrators' actions and narrative choices. Just as Alma's inquiry did in *The History of Love*, Evelina's questions in *The Plague of Doves*, alert readers to relevant details in other character's sections. To make things more complicated, many narrators position themselves as the audience of oral stories,

readers of others' texts, and even as tellers of other characters' testimonies. The characters who narrate their own experience as narratees model for us how we might respond to the multiple raconteurs. In *The History of Love*, many characters are arrested by text-within-the-text's heroine, also named Alma. In Erdrich's *The Plague of Doves*, we only learn the story of the lynching because Evelina solicits the story from her grandfather, and the questions she asks about it orient readers as we traverse through the many narrators' sections.

The formal structure of braided narratives, which kaleidoscopally expand narrative situations, complicate Phelan's schema of ethical situations. Braided narratives not only multiply his "ethical positions" by the number of narrators, but also create a productive tension between situations and narrators. For instance, we can consider Phelan's second position "that of the narrator" not only in relation to what she tells, but also in relation to what the other narrators tell. In *The History of Love*, because we know of character-narrator Leo's fierce desire for recognition, we might evaluate Zvi's act of plagiarism more harshly. Similarly, in the penultimate chapter of *The Plague of Doves*, Bazil acknowledges his formal lover's racism. When that character, called C in Bazil's section, becomes the narrator of the final section, we may hold her account of events to a different moral rubric because of Bazil's convincing assessment. Appreciating the ethical power of the braided narrative is not just a matter of calculating the particular quirks of each added narrator, but also the ethical engagement is a function of the genre itself. In order to even address Phelan's third position, "that of the implied author in relation to the telling, the told, and the authorial audience," we must first make sense out of the complex interrelations between the various narrator's tellings and tolds (23). The work of sorting through this tangled web of interrelations and interlocked, but discrete, claims imbricates the reader in the intersubjective world of the text.

Even as we evaluate characters according to the ever-evolving ethical rubric of the novel, we begin to question also, our own connection and complicity.

The way in which the tension between multiple subjects can become a web that includes the reader becomes clearest for me through the concept of intersubjectivity particularly as theorized by feminist psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin, who built on Winnicott's theory of "potential space." In "Recognition and Destruction," Benjamin describes the process through which an infant learns that her mother has different needs, desires, and decisions and is not under the omnipotent control of the child. This momentary and fleeting recognition of another person's subjectivity in tension with one's own is intersubjectivity. Importantly, intersubjectivity depends on a difference between subjectivities just as braided narratives require multiple distinct narrative voices. This recognition of difference makes possible the recognition of the self. Infant psychologist Daniel Stern noticed a related phenomenon in his observations of mother infant play. He noticed that when mothers play with their infants they do not mimic exactly the activity of the child, but rather, make music in harmony with the infant. Stern calls this affective attunement, which he defines as "the performance of behaviors that express … the feeling of a shared affect state without imitating the exact behavioral expression of the inner state" (142). In order to communicate shared feeling, mothers and infants make different but compatible sounds and expressions. In braided narratives, each character narrator claims space in a subject position and invites the reader to share their perspective for a while. As readers move from one narrative to the next, we inhabit multiple subjectivities and negotiate the space between them. As we hold each narrative thread in mind, we can hear the harmony or the discord between the distinct narrative strands. This space between stories, the distance

between experiences, the jarring transition between narrators creates the sense of fragmentation that causes many to tag the genre as postmodern; however, intersubjective theory gives us different language to negotiate that rupture.

Any novel can invite an intersubjective relationship between the author and the reader as the latter brings the former's imagination to life in their mind. Novels featuring character narrators add another level to this potential intersubjectivity, as readers explore the narrator's mind via the text. Occasionally cunning and compelling character narrators ask us to assimilate their world-view and ethical stance entirely, in which case the intersubjectivity exists mostly between our mind and the author's as we imagine her creation. Narrators like these ask us to set aside our own perspective and see the world completely through their eyes, even when the author wants us to resist that temptation. It is precisely this allure that makes *Lolita* such a fascinating text for scholars of narrative theory. While most novels invite intersubjectivity insofar as they ask readers to adopt the narrator or protagonist's subjectivity, braided narratives take the project further in multiple directions. We must not only adopt a new subjectivity with each new narrator, but also account for the third space created between the narrative voices. Braided narratives both formally manifest Levinas' "facing position, opposition par excellence" insofar as multiple narratives face and oppose each other and position readers as a third inviting us to hold the different narratives together in our mind (196). We must negotiate that complex terrain of thirdness to even make sense of the novel as a whole. Braided formally shift the narrative perspective from one character's mind to another. Rather than assimilating a single character's perspective, readers must negotiate the intersubjective field between the many fictional minds. In braided narratives,

we not only engage the author's mind, but also become engrossed in the varying ways her characters relate to each other and the story world.

THE PLAGUE OF DOVES AND THE HISTORY OF LOVE

In her analysis of *Middlemarch*, Kay Young explains how George Eliot "uses the *metaphors* of voice, deafness, musicality, and attunement to sound" to propose "a *physical solution* to the problem of other minds" (77). Asking, as Eliot does, whether we can truly know the mind of another or probing, as Cavell does, whether we can feel another's pain are necessarily questions of intersubjectivity: is there a space where our two subjectivities can co-exist in harmony with each other? The sense of sound that Young traces in Eliot's exposition of these questions also draws our attention to the central conceit of the ethical thought I have drawn on, which imagines the claim of the other as a call, an aural cry that actually penetrates us with the literal vibrations of another's appeal. Both Erdrich and Krauss turn to sound as a central trope of intersubjectivity and ethics. For Erdrich sound represents that foundational dimension of ethics that Nussbaum imagines as an awareness and perception of the invisible strands that pull people toward each other. For Krauss, like many authors after the Holocaust, the absence of sound illustrates the foreclosure of intersubjectivity constituted by the historic refusal to hear or see that devastation. Both Erdrich and Krauss foreground the art of narrative as a medium central to facilitating the second ethical dimension that Nussbaum understands as responsibility. Erdrich figures the ethical work of narrative trough the representation of storytelling within her novel even as she practices it in her prose. Krauss has her characters turn to the eponymous fiction-within-a-fiction to assert the power of narrative that she demonstrates in her novel. Erdrich and Krauss reflect their ethical arguments in the formal structure of the novels themselves. As

braided narratives, *The Plague of Doves* and *The History of Love* twine together separate narrative strands in the same way that an orchestra conjures a symphony out of the distinct melodies of varied instruments. Just as a physical sound must enter our mind for us to hear another's call, braided narratives fill our imaginations with layered, co-occurring, and sometimes conflicting stories. Each narrative thread asks us to attend to the particular plea of an individual subject, and even as these stories multiply into a chorus or cacophony of claims we must develop provisional and ever-evolving rubrics to evaluate, respond to, and make sense of these various calls. Developing and altering this tenuous criteria trains readers in the second ethical dimension that Nussbaum understands as responsibility. In this way, braided narratives help readers to develop a sensibility of response that resonates across different subjectivities.

In *The Plague of Doves*, Erdrich celebrates music as both a conceptual model of braided narratives and the trope of intersubjectivity. Judge Antone Bazil Coutts attempts to use words, however inadequate, to explain the remarkable power of sound embodied in Shamengwa's violin music:

> Here I come to some trouble with words. The inside became the outside when Shamengwa played music. Yet inside to outside does not half sum it up. The music was more than music—at least what we are used to hearing. The music was feeling itself. The sound connected instantly with something deep and joyous. Those powerful moments of true knowledge that we have to paper over with daily life. The music tapped the back of our terrors, too. Things we'd lived through and didn't want to ever repeat. Shredded imaginings, unadmitted longings, fear and also surprising pleasures. No, we can't live at

> that pitch. But every so often something shatters like ice and we are in the river of our existence. We are aware. And this realization was in the music, somehow, or in the way Shamengwa played it. (Erdrich 196).

Bazil claims "music was feeling itself" (196). He describes the unsettling art of Métis elder, Shamengwa, whose music can penetrate the habituated individuality of human life, pushing people to the precipice of their deepest emotions regardless of their valence, and sometimes sweeping people away in a shared stream of collective knowing. The transcendent powers of violin chords echo through the pages of Erdrich's novel; the music stops murders and motivates escapes, brings unbridled joy and acknowledges desperate pain, arrests characters and moves them to action. In this passage, Erdrich gives Bazil the same word to describe the unique plane where Shamengwa's music transports its audience. But Erdrich does not assign this power to music alone. Raw sounds— non-verbal cries— share the ability to penetrate characters with an attachment deeper than their articulable commitments and conscious desires. There is something about sound, whether it is the gentle summit of a string solo, the violent drum of thunder, or grating bawl of a baby's cry, that enters someone's soul in ways mere images cannot, drawing us out into "the river of our existence" (196).

As the violin music reverberates through the novel, it claims the power to free and to kill. Corwin Peace, a distant descendant of one of the lynching's victims and one of its perpetrators, visits Evelina in the mental asylum where she has made the Chekhovian switch from staff to patient. Evelina explains how Corwin's chords captivate herself and the other patients. Evelina describes the mesmerizing effect of the music:

> The playing of the violin is the only thing in the world and in that music there is dark assurance. The music understands, and it will be there whether we

stay in pain or gain our sanity, which is also painful. I am small. I am whole. Nothing matters. Things are startling and immense. (246)

While Bazil begins with language of inversion to describe the power of Shamengwa's music, Evelina turns to size to describe the craft of his apprentice. Corwin's music helps her to evade the written rules and to escape the asylum: "'I can't leave here,' I say. / And I walk out of that place" (246). Evelina, who has been practicing the art of journaling, describes the effect Corwin's music has on the other patients. Most significantly and tellingly, Warren Wolde, who wanders on the periphery of many sections muttering violently to himself, reacts wildly to the music. He paces rapidly around the room, suffers a heart attack, and slumps against the wall. This is only the most obvious tell that Warren is the murderer in the opening scene. Warren's death at the Corwin's bow may be considered a moment of poetic justice—the descendant of a victim of the lynching unknowingly takes musical revenge on the actual perpetrator. On the other hand, the same type of music that originally stopped Warren's from violent fury also stops his heart, releasing him from his life-long struggles with sanity. So perhaps both sets of strings vibrate with a similar compassion.

However, even as she asserts the power of non-verbal sounds, Erdrich proposes a special relationship between this pure feeling made possible through music and the craft of narrative. Erdrich gifts Shamengwa's brother, Mooshum, the patriarch of the novel's central family, with music's sister art of storytelling: "Shamengwa was driven to music and Mooshum to stories" (22). In some ways a good narrative, especially when penned by Erdrich's hand or imparted by one of her character narrators, has the same characteristics as Shamengwa's music. Good stories too can freeze us with the bareness of their emotional pitch; they can make us laugh or cry, and, like the music, they can move us to a deeper

awareness. But stories also differ from sound. They are not transitory reverberations floating in air, but rather kernels of plot or turns of phrase that lodge themselves in the mind. Stories do not maintain the unbearable intensity of Shamengwa's music the whole way through, but instead are the stuff of daily life with brief peaks of poignancy. As Kay Young and Jeff Saver explain, narrative is the autobiographical aptitude for how we know ourselves as individuals and, as Hayden White, Benedict Anderson, and Patrick Hogan suggest, narrative is a key tool for imagining ourselves in relation to others, as communities, nations, and histories. Erdrich, who Carl Gutiérrez-Jones aptly calls "a literary pillager," uses her art not only to craft "those powerful moments of true knowledge" but also to give us frameworks for how we might understand the pull of these emotions and respond responsibly (Gutiérrez-Jones 103; Erdrich 196).

We have already seen how the fragile recorded notes of a violin solo not only stopped the murderer at the height of his bloody deed and how the frail desperation in the infant's cry compelled the passing men to care for her despite their higher order judgment. But we have also seen how Erdrich splits this story, not only between the omniscient opening narrator and character narrator Evelina, but also among Mooshum and other community members' varied versions. Erdrich represents the compelling power of sound through both the gramophone recording and the infant's desperate cries, but each time she refers to it, she shifts the narrative lens, so, as in a kaleidoscope, we see the same event multiplied and fragmented drawing our attention to the complicated relationship between the crimes and the expanding generations. Each time we hear the story, the primal cries still pull, but we also understand the scene through layered rubrics of "historically conditioned" responsibility. The idea of "historically conditioned" attempts to echo in both sound and sense American Studies scholar

Tricia Rose's concept of "politically conditioned love," which she explains as "a love that connects interpersonal healing to larger social contexts, but does not allow those contexts to justify all responses to it" (37). Just as Rose's concept opens a space for love and attachment, even while holding our loved one's politically accountable, historically conditioned responsibility seeks to attend both the historic and socially constructed lenses that frame an event as well as the needs of the participants themselves. As we have seen Mooshum's initial version introduces the racist threat of lynching, which complicates the ways the passing men can respond to the child's wails. Even though adolescent Evelina believes Mooshum's initial confession to her "was the one time he told the story whole," she later learns her grandfather left out his own complicity (68). At the beginning of her adulthood, Evelina learns from sister Mary Anita, a descendant of one of the lynch mob members, that Mooshum had told the vigilante ringleader that he and his friends found the dead at Lochren farm. Upon hearing Sister Mary Anita's story Evelina writes,

> Nowhere in Mooshum's telling of the events did he make himself responsible. He never said that he had been the one who betrayed the others, yet instantly I knew it was true. Here was why the others would not speak to him in the wagon. Here was the reason he was cut down before he died. (251)

Evelina understands that this is a strand of the story that Mooshum could not tell although the truth of it echoes in his details. Instead, Sister Mary Anita, who feels the guilt of her ancestors in her own veins, becomes another represented narrator who plaits her thread with Mooshum's pushing Evelina to evaluate the event with another lens of knotted complicity. Importantly, Evelina does not use this new version to override her grandfather's previous accounts, and she does not use his complicity to condemn him or dismiss him from her life.

Instead, she confronts him with her awareness, twining her own voice in braid of stories that collectively attempt to acknowledge this history. As Rose writes, "politically conditioned love" is not "reserved only for those who offer politically sanctioned behavior," bur rather, it "aims to affirm and transform, to show compassion while" acknowledging the real suffering that person may have helped to cause (37).[84] Evelina and Mooshum visit the hanging tree together each aware that the victims of the past still cry with wounds that cannot find justice in the present. The grandfather and granddaughter hold the history between them; while we can speculate that her acknowledgement of his complicity helps Mooshum to find some sort of peace, we do know that Evelina's awareness and embrace of the history helps her to find her place in the community.

While the power of music and sound echoes through the multiple and distinct narratives, Evelina's description of Corwin's playing can help us to imagine the intersubjective work of braided narratives. Corwin begins his asylum performance with a few simple melodies: "a slow and pretty tune that makes people's eyes unfocus," "a lively jig that has a sense of humor in the phrasing," and "a Red River jig" (245). These opening numbers are not unlike the opening stories of Erdrich's novel. Evelina's first section dwells

[84] Rose proposes "politically conditioned love" in her discussion of Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959). Rose argues that "Mama demands that Beneatha account for the real pressures and suffering caused by Walter's experiences with racism and their relationship to his expectations regarding proper manhood; she suggests that his plan be rejected but that he remain fundamentally loved" (37). For Rose and Erdrich, political accountability and love are not mutually exclusive.

patiently on her adolescent attachments; Bazil's focalization of John Wildstrand has humor not only in the phrasing, but in the premise of the plot itself: Wildstrand stages his own wife's kidnapping to steal money from himself; and the Red River jig reminds us of the passionate love affairs the Milk family is known for. After these introductory phrases, Evelina writes, "[t]hen something monstrous happens. All sounds merge for a moment in the belly of the violin and fill the room with distress" (245). While the physical reality of words prevent Erdrich's narrative strands from merging on the page, at some point in her novel the various stories coalesce in our mind overwhelming us with the bloody interconnections of lineage and guilt, the sweet affinity of layered attachments, and the moving resonance of repeated imagery. Like Evelina did at the beginning of the novel and this chapter, some readers trace complicated family trees or plot maps in an impossible effort to keep the narrative threads separate. Erdrich's novels render readers' minds into the "belly of the violin" where multiple narratives, and the subjectivities they contain, intermingle in an unsettling chaos of awareness that evolves into a sensibility of responsibility.

While Erdrich foregrounds the power of sound to represent a human interconnection that transcends the physical limits of our bodies, Krauss stages her novel in the vacuum of perception associated with the Holocaust, the fundamental denial of human recognition constituted by attempted annihilation. Krauss, like many authors who attempt to write in the shadow of that terrible massacre, turns to the trope of silence and invisibility almost as if the historic failure to recognize and respond to the cries of millions results in an experience of the self as absent for those who survive. Krauss's first narrator Leo claims that when he came to the states in 1947 he did not show up in photographs because "the way others had lost a leg or an arm, I'd lost whatever the thing is that makes people indelible" (81). Zvi

Litvinoff, the other major character from Leo's generation who Krauss focalizes through a third-person narrator in a separate narrative strand, escapes to Chile where he thinks of his love interest Rosa that "*sooner or later she'll figure out the truth: you're a shell of a man, all she has to do is knock against you to find out you're empty*" (158). Krauss makes clear that both her survivors' experience of themselves as invisible and hollow stems from what they think of as an inability to conceive of what happened to their families. Many have pointed out that such immense violations resist comprehension. Psychoanalyst Dori Laub, who founded Yale's Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, writes, "[m]assive trauma precludes its registration; the observing and recording mechanisms of the human mind are temporarily knocked out, malfunction" (57). The human mind, it seems, does not want to fathom, cannot make sense of, and resists witnessing such horrific violence. Leo narrates his escape three times in the novel; in the first he writes,

> The morning we heard their tanks approaching, my mother told me to hide in the woods. I wanted to take my youngest brother, he was only thirteen, but she said she would take him herself. Why did I listen? Because it was easier? I ran out to the woods. I lay on the ground. Dogs barked in the distance. Hours went by. And then the shots. So many shots. For some reason they didn't scream. Or maybe I didn't hear their screams. Afterwards, only silence. (8)

In this first telling, Leo not only affirms Daub's observation that people do not want to acknowledge the possibility of such destruction, but Krauss adds an aural distinction. Leo can hear the logic of his mother's command, the barks of the dogs and so many guns, but he cannot hear any screams. Importantly, Leo separates the lack of screams from the possibility

that he didn't hear them scream to hold open the space for a trauma that his younger self did not want to believe could happen. Laub writes, "speakers about trauma on some level prefer silence so as to protect themselves from the fear of being listened to—and of listening to themselves" (58). Although Leo is not silent, like many of those who shared their testimony with Laub, the silence in his story speaks to the same fear—not hearing the screams protects him from calls he could not answer.[85] The difference between the profound emphasis on sound in *The Plague of Doves* and the focus on silence in *The History of Love* does not indicate a disparity in intersubjective understanding of the two novels. Rather, Krauss emphasizes silence to underscore the foreclosure of intersubjectivity constituted by attempted annihilation—the ultimate refusal to feel the pull of another translates into a world defined by visceral absences. Although Erdrich's novel too brushes up against this world of silence, her characters insist on the power sound. In dark scene of the lynching, the Native men face hatred and destruction by singing their death songs, even when strangled by the rope.

Although Krauss dwells on the silence her characters experience, they, like Erdrich's, turn to art as a way out of darkness. Rather than turning to sound as Erdrich's characters do

[85] Zvi, who escaped sooner than Leo, also feels suffocated by what happened to his family, which, Krauss refuses to write. Rather than explain how Zvi's family was killed, Krauss writes "[b]it by bit Litvinoff learned what had happened to his sister Miriam, and to his parents, and to four of his other siblings (what had become of his oldest brother, Andre, he could only piece together from probabilities" (156). While Leo couldn't see or hear and didn't want to believe what happened to his family, Zvi, does know or can at least piece it together, but Krauss doesn't share the content of the knowledge with readers just as Zvi does not confide it in Rosa. Instead, the inability to assimilate such knowledge crushes Zvi.

by singing their death songs, Krauss's characters look to narrative fiction. Leo narrates his escape from the Nazis a second time in his autobiographical novel *Words for Everything*; he writes in the third-person, "[o]n a bright, hot day in July, they entered Slonim. At that hour, the boy happened to be lying on his back in the woods thinking about the girl. You could say it was love for her that saved him" (12). Although this second account begins almost the same way as the first, with the ominous approach of the Nazis, Leo replaces the hours of silence with thoughts of the girl he loved. In the difference between these accounts, Krauss shifts the project from trying to know or make sense of an incomprehensible violence to considering how one can survive it.

In his second novel, tagged as story world fiction, Leo introduces his beloved with a call that wants a response: "[o]nce upon a time there was a boy who loved a girl, and her laughter was a question he wanted to spend his whole life answering" (11). Leo's response comes in the form of fiction: he writes both the first novel *The History of Love* and his second novel *Words For Everything* in an effort to translate his feelings for Alma into words that can be shared. Just as the sound of his beloved's laughter calls the boy to poetic response, so too does the hope of attachment with her call Leo to want to survive. Just as Benjamin described in her discussion of mother infant engagement, the intersubjective interplay in *The History of Love* suggests that two subjectivities are necessary to existence: we cannot see ourselves without the recognition of another just as that person cannot see herself without our recognition. Leo explains this intersubjective interdependency when he decides to take his cousin's photograph after he himself didn't show up in the film. When his cousin's photo does appear, they both laugh, and Leo explains "[i]t was I who'd taken the picture, and if it was proof of his existence, it was also proof of my own" (82). The

photograph is not the first or most important object characters attach to in an effort to affirm their existence despite great rupture. *The History of Love*'s eponymous book-within-a-book that Leo wrote for Alma functions at first it seems as a flimsy hope for connection in the impending shadow of what will become the Holocaust. When his girlfriend leaves for America, young Leo sends her his manuscript pages of the book-within-the-book. Here, just as in Winnicott's vision of the "transitional object" that both parents and children use to make possible their separation, Leo imagines that his book will help bridge his separation with Alma. In the second telling of his escape in *Words for Everything*, the writer Leo asserts this faith in a future attachment, a love for his childhood sweetheart, Alma saves him from death. According to Leo's account in *Words for Everything* and his obituary (printed as the last page of both Krauss's novel and the book-within-the-book), responding to the call of his lover not only saves his life, but *is* his life.

In the face of the unfathomable, Zvi, in his narrative thread, also looks to fiction. Zvi, devastated by reality, begins to translate his copy of the manuscript that Leo had entrusted him to keep, which again shifts the question from 'can we make sense of the Holocaust?' to 'can we make a life knowing that such horrors are possible?' By having the third person narrator who focalizes Zvi claim that he did not "think to himself: I am going to plagiarize my friend who was murdered by the Nazi's. Nor did he think: If she thinks I wrote this, she will love me," Krauss frames Zvi's plagiarism/translation of Leo's manuscript as an uncritical turn to fiction because "the truth" failed him (183, 156). Because Zvi's sections progress backwards in time, we know that Zvi dies unable to confess this lie that weighs on him still haunted by the belief that Rosa *only* loves him because he authored the novel-within-the-novel. Rosa, as it happens, already knew and went to great lengths, such as

flooding their house, to protect his secret. Their relationship exemplifies a poignant and bitter intersubjective understanding, also founded on a transitional object. The couple built their shared commitment around his authorship of Leo's novel, a fiction that they both know is a lie, but because of their love for one another, it's a lie that neither can admit. In an odd turn, narrator-Leo shares the novel with his imaginary friend Bruno, a character perhaps based on the actual writer Bruno Shultz, but Krauss's Bruno accuses Leo of stealing "bits" (132). If there is a logic to imaginary friends, Bruno's jibe suggests that Leo himself knows he took parts of his novel from his childhood friend. Thus, both Leo and Zvi turn to the fiction-within-a-fiction in an effort intentional or not to make life worth living in the face of the Holocaust and neither can take full credit for the novel-within-the-novel.

Importantly, fiction provides a medium that makes possible what the Holocaust sought to foreclose: recognition and attachment. In *The History of Love*, Krauss suggests that when one actually sees another, one ought to respond with an acknowledgement of that sight. Leo named every girl in the novel after his childhood sweetheart, Alma, the single name Zvi cannot change to a Spanish counterpart. Zvi attempts to rename Alma Rosa, after his own love, "[b]ut if, when he want to write a capital R where there had been a capital A, Litvinoff's hand stalled, perhaps it was because he was the only person, aside from its true author, to have read *The History of Love* and known the real Alma" (183). Zvi cannot write Rosa because he knows that Alma was real. Zvi must acknowledge Alma's reality partly because as Laub pointed out, the Holocaust not only sought to annihilate a people but also to destroy the knowledge of that violence. Here, it is the very knowledge that crushed Zvi, the acknowledgment of an event that resists knowing, the understanding of something that cannot be seen or heard, that prevents Zvi from changing Alma's name. Zvi's act of

acknowledgement might stand for Krauss's intervention. Perhaps, it is right that we cannot comprehend the horror of the Holocaust, but we should never fail to acknowledge the reality of its victims. The narrator goes on to explain that the original Alma played no true-love role in Zvi's memories aside from the model of his adolescent "reveries (which relied heavily on the technique of montage)" (184). Instead, Zvi cannot change Alma's name because she was once real, and her very reality inspired his friend Leo to write the novel. Zvi's narrative is so poignant because buried within his act of plagiarism is an act of witnessing. Although Zvi's plagiarism of Leo effaces the great writer, his recognition of Alma makes possible, as we will see, the poignant connection that ends the novel.

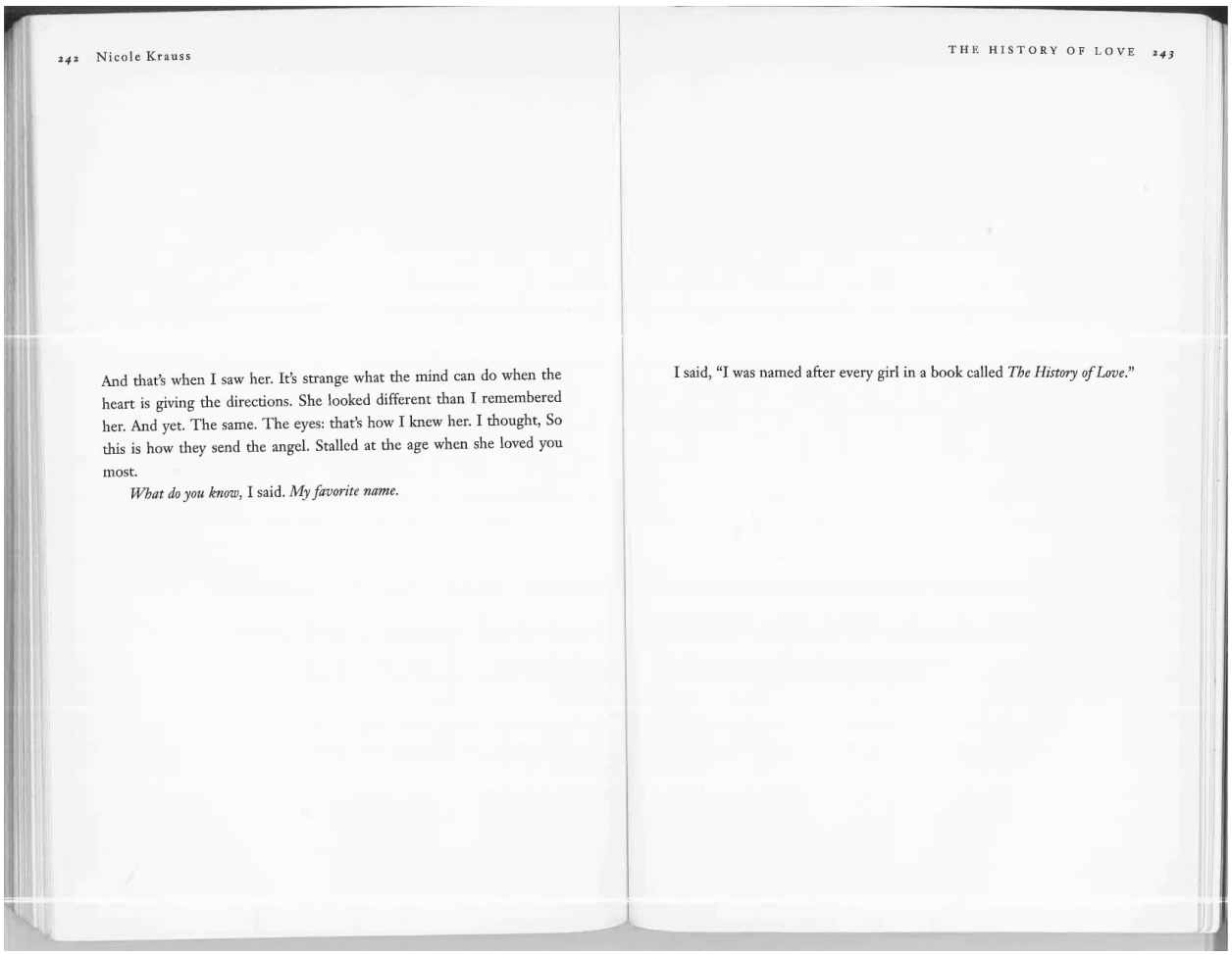
The History of Love's eponymous fiction-within-a-fiction runs through multiple narrators' chapters, the way the story of the lynching runs through *The Plague of Doves*, creating a pull that twines the narrative threads together despite the historical forces that try to rend the characters apart. Like in *The Plague of Doves*, these various, and sometimes conflicting narrative threads, intermingle in the reader's mind leaving us with an awareness of an interconnection too profound for the characters themselves to grasp. Leo's first novel not only connects his narrative strand to Zvi's, but the text also provides the medium for Alma's parents' relationship, a fact that Alma details in her sections but that remains unknown to both Leo and Zvi. Alma's father fell in love with Zvi's translation and gifted it to her mother, who in turn named their daughter "after every girl in a book called *The History of Love*" (243).

This book-within-a-book, however, is not only the means of romantic attachments; it also connects across generations, another understanding that only Alma elaborates. Alma seeks to know more about her father, who died when she was seven, by reading the novel

that he gave to her mother. Further, Leo's son, who never knew his true father, suspected that Leo authored *The History of Love* and hired Alma's mother to translate it from Spanish to English, so he could compare it with the Yiddish manuscript in his mother's love letters. *The History of Love* does not only call to characters, asking to be read, but also pushes them towards actual attachments. Just as Evelina's adolescent curiosity primes readers for the cohering importance of the opening violence and awful vengeance, teenage Alma orients us towards the way *The History of Love*-within-*The History of Love* functions as a heuristic connecting the novel's fragmented narrative strands. When Alma feels the recognition of her namesake's reality in Zvi's translation, she begins collecting clues alerting readers to the novel's central thread. We carry Alma's questions with us in other narrator's chapters and continue her sleuthing even when she gives up. Because Alma directs us towards the connective function of the novel-within-the-novel, we learn that Leo's son was able to read some of his father's work because of Zvi and Alma's mother's respective translation, partially satisfying Leo's deepest wish that "there had been a brief window of time in which Issac [his son] and I [Leo] both lived, each aware of the other's existence" (212). We can feel *The History of Love*'s intersubjectivity both in the relationship's between characters and in the structure of the novel itself.

The formal and felt intersubjectivity of braided narratives is clearest perhaps in the final scene of *The History of Love* where our first two narrators aged Leo and teenage Alma meet for the first time. Until this point, Alma and Leo's narrative perspectives have remained as disparate as when we opened the novel; the two characters are not even aware of the other's existence as they head to Central Park for a meeting mysteriously arranged by Alma's younger brother. Unlike every other chapter in the book, which Krauss assigns to a

single narrator, this final scene, titled "A+L," is shared by Alma and Leo. The figure illustrates how Krauss puts Leo's narration on the left, odd pages and Alma's on the right, even pages.



242 Nicole Krauss

And that's when I saw her. It's strange what the mind can do when the heart is giving the directions. She looked different than I remembered her. And yet. The same. The eyes: that's how I knew her. I thought, So this is how they send the angel. Stalled at the age when she loved you most.

What do you know, I said. *My favorite name.*

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I said, "I was named after every girl in a book called *The History of Love.*"

Figure 5: Pages 242-243 in Nicole Krauss's *The History of Love*

As we know from spending the novel in each of their minds, Leo and Alma rely on opposite modes for making sense of the world. Leo has spent much of his life living in fantasy, a strategy that not only allows him to see elephants and his imaginary friend Bruno, but also helps him to survive the deep losses caused by the Holocaust. While Leo lives his life in his imagination, Alma clings to the distinction between what is and what is not. Her belief in reality leads her on a search through the record offices of New York for a non-fiction

corollary to the heroine of the book-within-the-book. Although Alma's trust in truth is the opposite, so to speak, of Leo's faith in fantasy, both mental organizing principles prevent the characters from recognizing each other. When Alma arrives at Central Park where Leo had already been waiting, she sits on a different bench, and only eventually finds Leo because he labeled himself with the index card that reads "MY NAME IS LEO GURSKY" (239). Even after they begin conversing, Leo persists in believing that Alma is the angelic version of his childhood sweetheart coming to lead him to death, and Alma continues to collect facts and insist on truths.

Only through conversation, a dialogue mirrored by the shared narration, can Leo and Alma break out of their rigid organizing scripts and co-create an intersubjectivity mirrored in the chapter's structure. Krauss demonstrates their intersubjective encounter in the form of the chapter by having their alternating pages become closer and closer to narrating the same moment, although importantly, just as in Stern's model of affective attunement, they never reach perfect synch. This thirty-page alternation between narrators shows on the level of the page what braided narratives usually do on the level of the chapter: represent the inner thoughts and feelings of multiple subjectivities as they falteringly try to establish a connection. The large spaces Krauss leaves blank stand for both the physical and figurative distance that separates Alma and Leo and the potential for their connection. Because of Alma's facial expression in response to his questions, Leo thinks "[w]hat if the girl sitting next to me on this bench was real?" (248). Asking this question, which in itself suspends his modus operandi of imagining everything, also opens Leo up to other understandings. This openness, in turn, releases Alma from the premise of her research; she writes, "[a]nd then I realized that I'd been searching for the wrong person. I looked into the eyes of the oldest man

in the world for a boy who fell in love when he was ten" (251). Through the dialectical progress of their conversation, Alma unwittingly responds to Leo's early ethical call to be seen (3). Although the opposing pages seem to adopt a dyadic structure, Alma and Leo relate more like soap-bubbles than interchangeable blue marbles—their sense of being shifts and changes in relation to the other. Because the fifteen-year-old Alma "was named after every girl" in Leo's book, she is, in a sense, the product of his imagination, but not in the same register as the elephant or as Bruno (243). Instead, the power of the novel-within-the-novel lead both Leo and Alma to a real, but temporary, connection as other subjects. This mutual recognition emerges in the third space between the two characters, a space held open for readers by the literal blanks on the page. Krauss's novel closes with the wavering between subjectivities, an embrace between the two major narrators, a real relationship forged through fiction. By staging this momentary meeting as the novel's final scene, in what Peter Rabinowitz would call the "privileged position" of the ending, Krauss endows the characters' connection with greater significance for readers (58). The third potential space that emerges between Alma and Leo becomes, from a different angle, the potential space between the author and the reader.

While *The History of Love* proposes a potential for human recognition and attachment even in the shadow of deep grief and collective trauma, *The Plague of Doves* cautions that such an acknowledgment should include an accounting of personal responsibility, a measuring made possible by narrative. Bazil, who rarely mentions the lynching despite the historical focus of his sections, finally admits his own relationship to the legacy of the violence that manifests itself as an affair with the mass murder's survivor, Dr. Cordelia Lochren, who slept with Bazil, but will not treat Native people. Despite his formative

attachment to Cordelia, which Bazil had spent the whole chapter divulging to us, he had not yet discussed her with his wife, Geraldine. Erdrich previously published the part of the chapter chronicling Bazil and Cordelia's relationship as a short story titled "Demolition" in the *New Yorker,* but she added the final conversation between Bazil and Geraldine for the novel. In that scene, Bazil first wants to "defend [the] innocence" of his early attachment to Cordelia, but just as Alma's subjectivity jars Leo out of his regular organizing principles, so too does Geraldine's subjectivity challenge Bazil's (291). Bazil senses "a sudden cleft of space between us," a distance that becomes a potential space; he catches a glimpse of "disappointment" in her eyes, but most importantly listens to the series of condemning anecdotes that his wife has to share (291). Geraldine helps Bazil understand how his prior relationship allows Cordelia to feel a false sense of absolution for the crime committed in her name and a temporary forgiveness for the lingering racism that shapes her medical practice. Geraldine's stories function for Bazil the way the multiple accounts of the murder and lynching function for readers—they layer the event with historic contexts pushing the audience to a richer sense of responsibility for our own complicity in benefiting from or helping to forget the violence of our shared history. When Bazil finally realizes Cordelia's racism, he writes, "I'd always be her one exception. Or worse, her absolution. Every time I touched her, she was forgiven. I thought the whole thing out—as Geraldine says, I took in the history" (292). While Cordelia uses Bazil to try to absolve herself of an historic crime, Geraldine faces him with an accounting of the past that both facilitates a deeper recognition within their relationship and calls Bazil to acknowledge a responsibility for his present and future attachments. While Bazil and Geraldine's interaction may seem simply a scene of

intersubjectivity between characters, it takes on greater significance when we turn the page and find that Erdrich allows Cordelia to narrate the novel's final chapter.

Erdrich raises ethical questions in this wide intersubjective gap between Bazil and Cordelia's narrative perspectives: How should we evaluate Cordelia's account? Can we trust her story knowing what Bazil and Geraldine know? Although Bazil's offers an apt and condemning assessment of her character, Erdrich both privileges Cordelia with the final word and prevents her from acknowledging or growing from her own racism. Erdrich also published this final chapter "Disaster Stamps of Pluto" in the *New Yorker.* However, she added all of Cordelia's references to her former lover, indications of her own prejudice, and references to the revenge lynching for the novel. In those small but significant additions, Erdrich muddies Cordelia's clear conscience, "[i]t is as though the freak of my survival charged my disposition with gratitude. Or as if my family absorbed all of the misfortune that might have come my way. *I have loved intensely.* I have lived an ordinary and a satisfying life, and I have been privileged to be of service to people. *Most people.* There is no one I mourn to the point of mad- ness and nothing I would really do over again" (I italicized phrases added for the novel 308). Cordelia's concession, "[m]ost people," not only affirms the truth of Bazil's critique, but also alerts us that she is only partially aware of her own flaw. Rather than using our imagination to fill the space between characters, as we did in *The History of Love,* in Erdrich's novel, we must use Bazil's final words to color our reading of Cordelia. The discrepancy between the ways Bazil and Cordelia report and regard her refusal to treat Indians poses ethical questions for the readers. Remembering Evelina's claim "now that some of us have mixed in the spring of our existence both guilt and victim, there is no unraveling the rope," we see the final narrator, not only as the novel's first victim, but also as

an adult who bears responsibility to her community (243). The transition from the represented intersubjectivity between Bazil and Geraldine to the formal intersubjectivity between Bazil and Cordelia's narrative perspectives challenges readers to hold multiple subjectivities in our minds simultaneously. We not only read Cordelia through Bazil's realization, but also trust her, as Erdrich does, with the novel's final word. Instead of adopting Cordelia's perspective completely, as we might if she were the sole narrator, we hold her at a distance made possible by the intersubjective space of braided narratives. Like the "sudden cleft of space" between Bazil and Geraldine this distance between subjectivities becomes a potential space for recognition and acknowledgement (291). While *The History of Love* poses fiction as the space through which we can form real connections, *The Plague of Doves* proposes storytelling as the essential venue for characters to "as Geraldine says . . . [take] in the history" (292). As Erdrich makes her characters account for their potential complicity in past crimes, her novel invites readers to consider how our own ethical commitments should also be responsible for our shared history.

The genre of braided narratives negotiate, as *The Plague of Doves* and *The History of Love* do, both the gulf between people craved by historic violence and those small fissures that separate us even from those whom we most love. By plaiting together separate narrative strands, distinct in terms of both the teller and the told, braided narratives push readers to attend to multiple subjectivities simultaneously. Unlike some rubrics that seek to redress socially constructed differences through assimilation and effacement of particularity, braided narratives function like an orchestral performance where the production itself depends on the intermingling of distinct and different sounds, melodies, and instruments. In this way, braided narratives train readers in a different sort of ethics, one that emphasizes an awareness

of a variety of particular calls and one that demands a historically and politically conditioned responsibility. Unlike musical performances however, where a different artist conjures their part of the composer's arrangement on their particular instrument, readers use the author's words to create the stories in our mind. What Evelina describes as sounds "merge[ing] for a moment in the belly of the violin" happens for readers on the stage of our own imagination (245). This can be distressing and uncomfortable as Evelina describes of the violin's climax, but it can also feel good and rewarding because our mind becomes the "potential space" that makes intersubjectivity possible. As we have seen in our reading of *The History of Love*, the joy of recognition requires two different subjects, and as we learned in *The Plague of Doves*, such recognition sometimes demands a response that is accountable to history even as it faces towards the future.

CODA

> My girl, I saw the passing of times you will never know.
>
> I guided the last buffalo hunt. I saw the last bear shot. I trapped the last beaver with a pelt of more than two years' growth. I spoke aloud the words of the government treaty, and refused to sign the settlement papers that would take away our woods and lake. I axed the last birch that was older than I, and I saved the last Pillager.
>
> Fleur, the one you will not call mother.
>
> —Nanapush Louise Erdrich's *Tracks* (2)

Throughout "A Child's Call," I have traced the interpersonal, cognitive, affective, and ethical affordances of child-narrators to help readers face issues of racial violence and sexual violation. I conclude, however, with Louise Erdrich's *Tracks* (1988), a braided narrative that testifies to the power of a child's call, not through the voice of a child, but through the narration of an "old man" (2). Nanapush, one of two narrators in *Tracks*, tells all his chapters to Lulu, the woman the child he helped to raise has become. As an adult narrating his response to the implicit appeal of a child, and the adult she has grown into, Nanapush demonstrates how readers might respond to call sounded by the narrative voice of children. At the same time, *Tracks* both participates in and helps to forge the genre I am calling the braided narrative, which, as we saw in the last chapter, offers formal strategies that push readers face historical violence and rethink how we might live in its wake. Erdrich pairs the grandfather's stories with the fantastic musings of Pauline Puyat, a notoriously unreliable narrator who my students easily gloss as crazy. Erdrich writes Pauline's sections in dense paragraphs with shifting imagery that prevents readers from fully imagining the scenes she

narrates. However, the gaps between Nanapush's chapters and Pauline's, the discrepancies between his versions of events and hers, the distance between knowing what might have happened in the novel and what was imagined, all create an intersubjective space for readers to enter the text. These fissures form a challenge for readers to witness and acknowledge historical violence. Through the braided narrative of *Tracks*, Erdrich asks reader to better understand the historical violence and rise to a higher sense of collective responsibility in the present.

Erdrich activates a matrixial awareness in *Tracks* by foregrounding the destruction of mother-child relationships through historical violence. *Tracks* begins in the middle of what Anishinaabe critic Lawrence Gross categorizes as an "apocalypse.... the end of the world as the Anishinaabe had known it" (49). As Gross notices, Nanapush's repetition of "last" laments the loss of the natural world and human relations—like the "last Pillager," Nanapush and Pauline, *Tracks*'s other narrator, are the sole surviving members of their entire families.[86] Like the absent Mrs. Finch that makes possible the ethical intervention of *Mockingbird*, or the "missing mother" that activates the suspense of *The Round House*, the deceased mothers of *Tracks* leave behind vulnerable children who need different sorts of attachment and care. Nanapush saves Fleur from the consumption in the first chapter just as he cures Lulu of frostbite in his penultimate chapter. Although Pauline never gets confirmation of her family's death of the same epidemic, early in the novel she has recurring dreams of her "sisters and my mother swaying in the branches, buried too high to reach, wrapped in lace I

[86] Nanapush admits that the emphasis on last in terms of the Pillagers is a rhetorical gesture, as Fleur's cousin Moses survives as well.

never hooked" (15). That the "Anishinaabe apocalypse" left so many characters orphaned allows Erdrich to emphasize other sorts of attachment and care.

Nanapush, like many of Erdrich's characters, practices a radical sort of mothering in the sense that Alexis Pauline Gumbs explains. After rescuing her, Nanapush greets Fleur with the epithet "daughter" and understands himself as responsible for her even though they have no blood or legal connection (34). He claims Lulu, too, by offering his name when the local priest comes to baptize her. While this may seem to enact paternity in the western sense that associates the father with the law, Erdrich makes Nanapush's gesture both a masculine claim to sexual power *and* a maternal act that allows him to care for Lulu when Fleur cannot. Like Atticus in *Mockingbird*, Nanapush frames his actions in the paternal sphere of law and politics through a relationship with his adoptive daughters. Savvy to the wily ways of white settlers, Nanapush understands that his name "loses power every time that it is written and stored in a government file" (32). The fact that he let his name be recorded once on the day of Lulu's birth allows him to rescue her from boarding school. At the end of the novel he explains that he used that document to "wade through the letters, the reports, the only place where I could find a ledge to kneel on, to reach through the loophole and draw you home" (225). Nanapush not only acts the father in name and law, but also acts the mother in the sense that he cures Fleur and Lulu in their sickness and does what he can to shift the world so Lulu can stay home in her community.

In addition to claiming Lulu through the law of baptism, Nanapush enacts a maternal care not only by nursing her in sickness and caring for her into adulthood. While men and women can practice these behaviors, Nanapush conceives of them as feminine. Nanapush recalls his musings while curing Lulu of her frostbite:

> Many times in my life, as my children were born, I wondered what it was like to be a woman, able to invent a human from the extra materials of her own body. In the terrible times, the evils I do not speak of, when the earth swallowed back all it had given me to love, I gave birth in loss. I was like a woman in my suffering, but my children were all delivered into death. It was contrary, backward, but now I had a chance to put things into proper order. (167)

The consumption epidemic killed Nanapush's wives and all his children rendering him feminine in his grief. Instead of bearing a child as his wives had, Nanapush births loss. His sadness of their deaths becomes like a child. Lulu, however, the live child in his arms calls him to nurture the living rather than mourn the dead. He can put care back in "proper order" my nursing her through her illness, by caring for her the way his wives had cared for his children. In this way, while Nanapush "was like a woman in [his] suffering" he becomes like a mother in his realigning of attachments and care. Unlike Aunt Clemence and Bazil in *The Round House*, Nanapush can provide his adopted daughter and granddaughter with the sort of attention they need to face the trauma at the core of their novels. While Joe has to find out for himself what his mother endured, Lulu hears the violence that her own mother survived from the voice of her adoptive grandfather. The chapters themselves, written to represent the oral story that Nanapush tells Lulu, enact the sort of attention that Claudia and Frieda gave each other in *The Bluest Eye*.

As we saw in chapter two, the scene where Nanapush cures Lulu from frostbite best models the sort of intersubjectivity activated by child-narrators and braided narratives. Like the sound of Mrs. MacTeer's singing, which "took all of the grief out of the words and left

[Claudia] with a conviction that pain was not only endurable, it was sweet," Nanapush's cure songs help make Lulu's physical pain of frostbite bearable, and survivable (26). Nanapush can heal Lulu not only because he knows the right songs, but also because he recognizes Lulu's unique subjectivity. When the priest brings the doctor to help care for Lulu the white men pressure Nanapush to send her to a hospital. Nanapush's recognition of Lulu makes him resist:

> We all knew what was unsaid, but only I knew you. You were no quiet child, no pensive thing who could survive without running. You were a butterfly, a flash of wit and fire, a blur of movement who could not keep still. Saving you the doctor's way would kill you, which did not mean I was completely confident in my ability to save you, either. (168)

The collective knowledge of the adults represents the intrapsychic elaboration that as Jessica Benjamin explained in chapter two, we need to make sense of the world. The men know that Lulu suffers extreme frostbite and may die even if brought to advanced medical care. At the same time, Nanapush allows his relationship with Lulu to break through those intrapsychic representations in intersubjective recognition. The way that Erdrich writes his understanding of Lulu's subjectivity accords with Benjamin's assertion that moments of intersubjective recognition are temporary and fleeting. Rather than describing Lulu as a fixed entity, Nanapush offers glimpses of the child in motion—a butterfly, a flash, a blur. The same sort of recognition that Leo demands in *The History of Love* becomes key to saving Lulu in *Tracks*.

Even though Nanapush acts on his momentary recognition of Lulu's subjectivity, he also acknowledges that he cannot fully know her or pin down her identity. In the paragraph that follows the passage above, Nanapush explains,

> When you're married and have your children, you will know this: We don't have as much to do with our young as we think. They do not come from us. They just appear, as if they broke through the net of vines. Once they live in our lives and speak our language, they slowly seem to become like us. But Lulu, sinking past my sight then, you were not enough like me yet to tell me where you were going or how long you would stay. (168-169)

Almost in the same breath as expressing deep intersubjective recognition of Lulu, Nanapush admits her almost insurmountable alterity. As a toddler, Lulu does not have the language to put her pain into words—to make her experience in the world sharable. Even did she have access to his language, Lulu could not have known the information about her future Nanapush wanted her to disclose. This juxtaposition between intersubjective recognition of Lulu and an acknowledgement of the insurmountable distance between the Nanapush and the child speaks to the questions at the core of many novels—how can I know you? How can we form attachments in the face of such a precarious future, or as the historical setting of the novel suggests, in the shadow of such a violent past? Nanapush's narration models a possible response to the call of the child. He not only recounts the stories of how he cared for her and her mother, but the telling itself is an act of care. Just as in *The History of Love* and *The Plague of Doves*, storytelling emerges as an essential mode to establish a connection across unassailable distance.

Even as Nanapush's chapters demonstrate the sort of response a child can elicit, Erdrich alternates his chapters with those narrated by Pauline in an early example of the braided narrative. Like Fleur and Nanapush, Pauline loses her entire family to the consumption epidemic, but, unlike the others, she finds no companionship in her grief and no solace in proper burial. Her suffering stems not only from the injury itself, but also, and perhaps more poignantly, from her refusal of an intersubjective community that can acknowledge her pain. Even as a child Pauline rejects her parents, desiring "to be like my grandfather, pure Canadian" (14). She develops an idea that to be Native "is to perish," and she refuses to "speak our language," to bead, to tan hides, and instead convinces her father to send her to the settler town of Argus (14). So even when Fleur shows her kindness and affection, bathing the grown woman as one would a child, Pauline cannot accept her attention. Instead, Pauline invents a fantasy world both to hold the pain of her childhood traumas and to make sense of the voices she hears later in the novel. Pauline incorporates the other characters into her own fantasy world, endowing them with exaggerated attributes of good or evil. Often this involves taking on their pain in a futile and frustrating form of empathy. In her version of the gang rape at the beginning of the novel, Pauline conflates herself with Fleur even as she aids the rapists in a perverse crossing that defines her character. Pauline later acts as Death's gatekeeper, cleaning the dead before burial, accompanying the sick in their final hours, and, on one occasion, imagines herself as cutting the string between life and death (68). Because Erdrich writes *Tracks* as a braided narrative, she contrasts Pauline intrapsychic fantasies with Nanapush's intersubjective style. The gaps between their narratives challenge readers to maintain a sense of difference, so we can recognize Pauline's suffering and that of Fleur, which it inadequately describes.

As we have seen in the case of *The History of Love* and *The Plague of Doves*, in what I am calling the braided narrative, different narrators tell distinct stories that twine together to form a single novel. According to the classical understanding of narrative, a story represented in discourse, we can see that Erdrich's novel is comprised of two distinct narratives. Adopting the language of the novel, I'm thinking of discourse as tracks on the page—having "never learned to read," Nanapush's love interest is afraid of the "tracks [of newspaper type] rubbing off on her skin" (Erdrich 47). Nanapush and Pauline narrate their own distinct series of events in their own discursive styles that I represent here with footprints.

Figure 6: Footprints representing events narrated by Pauline and Nanapush

Through the comforting cadence of oral storytelling, Nanapush tells of the devastating winter of 1912, his courtship of Margaret Kashpaw, Lulu's birth, his standoff with the Morriseys, and Fleur's eventual departure from Matchimanito. Pauline's increasingly deranged style, on the other hand, details: failing to witness Fleur's rape, conjuring Eli and Sophie's affair,

bearing an unwanted child, joining the convent, and murdering the devil who takes the form of her child's father. Although both narrate in chronological order, many of their chapters overlap in time, focusing on different, often unrelated events, and in the few chapters where Nanapush picks up where Pauline leaves off, he denies her responsibility for causing those events.[87] Further, to put it in Seymour Chatman's language, what is a "kernel" event for one narrator registers barely as a "satellite" for the other (53). Lulu's birth, a key moment for Nanapush, gets as much air time in Pauline's sections as Napoleon's murder, her climax, gets in Nanapush's. As a braided narrative, *Tracks* invites us to query why an event of such importance for one narrator can be passed over by the other.

Both narrators do focalize Fleur's "path" to use Peter Rabinowitz's term for "a character's order of experience [that] may conform to neither the story order nor the discourse order," but I don't read *Tracks* as a single narrative centering on her story (183). Some of what Fleur endured, such as the gang rape, has different conflicting representations in Pauline and Nanapush's discourses. Other events are focused on, almost exclusively, by one narrator—such as Lulu's birth as told by Nanapush or Fleur's miscarriage as told by Pauline. As the gaps between prints indicate, many of Fleur's experiences go unnarrated altogether. Further, Pauline's accounts of Fleur begin as potentially mimetic representations

[87] On one hand, this is a forgiving interpersonal gesture as it dismisses Pauline's acts of malice and ignores her negligence: in chapter 5, he takes in Eli, when Fleur kicks him out after his affair with Sophie, and in chapter 7, he finds four-year-old Lulu freezing at his door because Pauline had let her run through the snow in patent leather shoes. On the other hand, this undermines Pauline's narrative authority as Nanapush refuses to acknowledge her role in the causal relationship between events.

of Fleur as a possible character in Erdrich's storyworld but disintegrate into thematic representations of Fleur in Pauline's mind. Although more respectful of Fleur, Nanapush also conscripts her character for his purposes. While Pauline projects her fantasies onto Fleur, Nanapush privileges her with a special connection to the past in order to obtain Lulu's pardon. Erdrich does not grant Fleur the same narratorial power that she does Nanapush and Pauline, and getting to tell your own story is what's at stake, not only because of the critiques I've already raised, but because of the ethical challenges narrators can make. In his delineation of the ethical positions that arise in narrative, Jim Phelan places narrators on a different level than characters because they raise questions about the events themselves *and* that narrator's relationship "to the telling, to the told, and to the audience" (23).[88] As in my discussion of *The Plague of Doves*, conflicting accounts of events and varying evaluations of characters require readers to temper our interpretation of one narrator's story with the account of another.

Given the primacy of ethics and the influence of the oral tradition, I turn to the rhetorical understanding of narrative that Phelan proposes as "somebody telling somebody else on some occasion and for some purpose(s) that something happened" (5). In this formulation, Nanapush tells Lulu, on the occasion of her proposed marriage, for the purpose of preventing that union and reuniting the child with her mother, why Fleur allowed Lulu to

[88] As we saw in chapter five, James Phelan identifies four situations: first, "that of the characters within the story world," second, "that of the narrator in relation to the telling, to the told, and to the audience," third, "that of the implied author in relation to the telling, the told, and the authorial audience," and fourth, "that of the flesh-and-blood reader in relation to the set of values, beliefs, and locations operating in situations 1-3" (Phelan 23).

go to boarding school. Nanapush frames the catastrophic changes that open the novel by stating his audience and purpose. His use of the second person positions us in Lulu's shoes and complicates us in the conflict that necessitates his story—even though it is Lulu who refuses to call Fleur mother readers might see some complicity in the history that facilitated that separation. We know Nanapush, true to character, told the entire story to Lulu in one long sitting because he pauses to comment on the adult Lulu's appearance and reactions. At one point he chastises Lulu about the time he cured her of frostbite that I discussed in the second chapter,

> I'm sure you've forgotten what happened next, for if you remembered, you would not wear such shoes as you have on at this moment– those heels, like tiny knives, and your toes sticking through! You'd wear footwrappings made of rabbit fur for protection, and no fine stockings either. (166)

Because our world is still structured by patriarchy, it's radical for Erdrich to situate her readers so explicitly in women's shoes. As Nanapush continually reminds Lulu, his exigency is not only sartorial, but also ethical: how she ought to behave towards her mother. As he did at the beginning of the novel, Nanapush implores Lulu to forgive her mother at the novel's end:

> But you, heartless one, won't even call Fleur mother or take off your pointy shoes, walk through the tough bush, and visit her. Maybe once I tell you the reason she had to send you away, you will start acting like a daughter should. She saved you from worse, as you'll see. Perhaps when you finally understand, you'll borrow my boots and go out there, forgive her, though it's you that needs forgiveness… (210)

Nanapush's exigency asserts a relational ethics—a need for interconnection, not only between grandfather and grandchild but also between mother and daughter.

Erdrich's repeated references to Nanapush's moment of telling highlights, as Carl Gutiérrez-Jones writes, that "Erdrich leaves Pauline's rhetorical situation undefined; a character seemingly obsessed with belonging, her chapters finally create no apparent connections to others" (107). Although Pauline specifies neither narratee nor occasion for telling, her narrative does have a clear purpose: to reconcile her perceived past sins with her vocation as a nun. While Nanapush tells his story in a single sitting, Pauline's seems to keep pace with the years she narrates because her understanding of her guilt and how she thinks she should deal with it evolves drastically. Taking her first murder as an example, we can see how she hesitates to claim responsibility. At one moment, Russell alone shuts the men in the freezer, but at another it's Pauline's limbs, acting almost on their own, that pull the bar down. As the novel progresses, Pauline's confidence in her own agency increases. While she maintains her characteristic voice through her long descriptive sentences, she loses her hesitancy, and as some claim, her ties to reality. She replaces her uncertainty with elaborate descriptions of a religious battle for souls. My students find Pauline confusing and hard to read as indicated by this word cloud of their impressions.

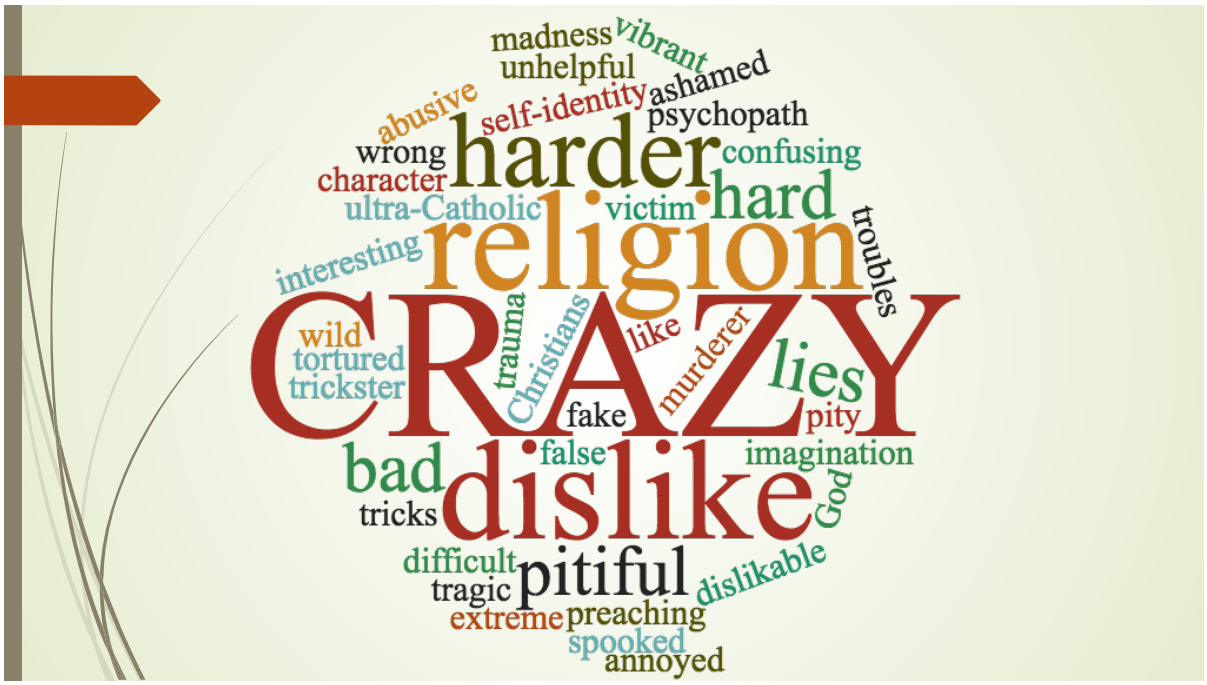

Figure 7: Word cloud of my students' reactions to Pauline collected via an IRB approved classroom study in 2016.

Pauline not only inflicts pain on Erdrich's flesh and blood readers, but also on her own body through self-assigned penances: she wears hair shirts, underwear made out of potato sacks, and shoes on the wrong feet. The literature on *Tracks* matches this discomfort with critical attention that treats Pauline with literary diagnoses ranging from unresolved trauma to a borderline personality disorder.[89] Although these scholars don't foreground ethics, their work acknowledges the ethical challenge Erdrich raises: Pauline does horrible things that these critics, like Pauline herself, try to explain, excuse, or at least understand. Regardless of

[89] Connie Jacobs and Lawrence Gross understand her as a victim of unresolved trauma. Allan Chavkin and Nancy Feyl Chavkin trace her "psychological deterioration" to a borderline personality disorder that causes her to distance herself emotionally from her various families (19). More sympathetically, Gutiérrez-Jones posits that her fantasies result from the "sublimation of the injuries that shape her stories" (107).

how we make sense out of Pauline,[90] the question remains: why pair her with Nanapush? How does the position the nun puts us in relate to the grandfather's appeal?

This is the heart of the braided narrative: by pairing two distinct narrators who tell two different, and conflicting stories, Erdrich not only forces us to see the multifaceted damage of settler colonialism, but also asks us to dwell with the complicated characters who are surviving it. Erdrich attunes her to contemporary debates about how to live in a world already harmed by history she narrates;[91] Gutiérrez-Jones points to the historical moment when Erdrich published the novel: the legal battles that led to the passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, which helps tribes reclaim their ancestors' bones. This context unites Nanapaush and Pauline. Early on, Nanapush acknowledges, but rejects, the rumors that blame his delay in burying the Pillagers for "the unrest and curse of trouble that struck our people" (4). Likewise, as we have seen, Pauline's first guilt is failing to bury her own family. The presence of past generations informs many of the novels discussed in this project. As we saw, in The Round House, places remember the crimes committed there, and the very architecture of The Plague of Doves includes the history of the place where it was built. Morrison links her child-narrators to slavery through the stories Cholly hears from Blue, and even Scout acknowledges the people who built Finch Landing.

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[90] Erdrich makes sure this descent into madness is also an ascent into sainthood: *The Last Report of the Miracles At Little No Horse* (2001) charts Sister Leopolda's canonization.

[91] Erdrich alerts her readers to the Allotment policies that allowed the U.S. to seize almost two thirds of Native lands, the devastating effects of boarding schools on families, and the creepy ever-present role of the church in colonization.

Although *Tracks* lingers on this liminal relationship between the living and the dead, just as it attends to the damaging policies of conquest, Erdrich ultimately asks her readers to turn towards the living. In the novel's penultimate scene, Nanapush sees all his deceased relatives whispering among the trees. Nanapush recalls,

> I stopped, stood among these trees whose flesh was so much older than ours, and it was then that my relatives and friends took final leave, abandoned me to the living.
>
> …. She took my arm, showed me how simple it was to follow, how comforting to take the step.
>
> Which I would have done happily, had only the living called from the shade. (220)

Nanapush's relatives mark their final departure with a tempting invitation for him to join them, but because Fleur chose to stay with the living, so does Nanapush. He stays because he feels called to care for Lulu and in turn tells this story to call her to forgive her mother. This plea for forgiveness, or at least understanding, resonates with Pauline's exigency to explain the hurt she experiences and causes. Although it's clear who bears responsibility for and continues to benefit from conquest, Erdrich doesn't let her characters off the hook either—both Pauline and Fleur abandon their daughters and Nanapush admits to axing the last birch before he saved the last Pillager. By following these narrators' tracks, we find ourselves caught among competing claims, some posed in second person: how can we balance forgiveness with accountability? How can we acknowledge a loss we cannot fully understand? When the waters are this muddy, so clouded with wrongs, perhaps we should like Nanapush "give them another stir" and make radical claims of attachment as he did for

Lulu— an act that is, because he named her after his own deceased daughter, as much an honoring of the past as a commitment to the future (61).

Like Louise Erdrich, Harper Lee, Toni Morrison, and Nicole Krauss innovate specific narrative strategies such as the child-narrator and the braided narrative to help readers negotiate these pressing questions of how to negotiate a world where racial and sexual violence persist. Child-narrators activate a sort of attention and concern that their adult counterparts do not. Their naïve perspectives not only assert the ethical claim that the content of their stories is wrong for children to hear and experience but also require readers to fill in the awful knowledge that the child cannot know. In *The Round House*, readers can answer the question the child asks "[w]hy did she smell like gas" and understand why Aunt Clemence cannot respond (15). In *The Bluest Eye*, we know that the fact that "Pecola was having her father's baby" means incestual rape, and we recognize the lynch mob Scout cannot (5). At the same time the authors equip these young raconteurs with subtle lessons— on Southern pride, case history, or power dynamics— that shift readers thinking.

While child-narrators help authors to engage specific social issues, the braided narrative offers a structure that requires readers to balance multiple, often conflicting experiences in our mind simultaneously. This layering of different versions of events proposes a type of empathy that requires difference. In *The History of Love*, Alma and Leo can recognize each other even though they each remain somewhat trapped in their own experiences. In *The Plague of Doves*, we can pity Cordelia for her loneliness even as we judge her for her racism. In *Tracks*, we can recognize that both Nanapush and Pauline suffer in different ways from the "Anishinaabe apocalypse," and, like the characters we can question our own complicity in the history the text engages. In the language of Claudia's

preface to *The Bluest Eye*: since the "why" of racial and sexual violence "is difficult to handle," "A Child's Call" "takes refuge in how"—the narrative strategies authors use to push readers to engage these issues that still plague our society. Now, it is left to us to take these authors cue and imagine and struggle for a community comprised of radical attachment and care.

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